

**Statement of Ukrainian Ambassador Ms Larysa Gerasko
to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
(5 December 2023, Dublin)**

Dear Chair,

Dear members of the Committee,

I am honoured to be here today and to brief the distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the latest developments in Ukraine, including ongoing war and our visible challenges for the future.

Before I turn to my remarks, let me, on behalf of the people of Ukraine, extend the words of appreciation for Ireland's support that we are receiving at this unprecedentedly challenging time for our country.

We are extremely grateful for that!

Today is the 650th day of the Russia's full-scale invasion of my country – a major escalation of the Russian war against Ukraine, which had begun in 2014. It resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and immense devastation. The displacement crisis it caused is becoming increasingly protracted. More than 11 million Ukrainians remain displaced, including 5 million within Ukraine and a further 6,2 million have been seeking safety abroad, including more than 100,000 who got temporary protection in Ireland.

Severe and intense military operations take place on the frontline, particularly the defence actions in Avdiyivka and Kupyansk as well as offensive operations in the south of our country. 963 settlements have been de-occupied in Ukraine. On the ground Ukraine's advancement is seriously complicated by Russia's intensive mine-laying and multi-layered defence extending up to 40 km in depth as well as dominance in the sky. Despite all challenges, Ukrainian troops are gaining success in a number of frontline areas. The Armed Forces of Ukraine took control of several bridgeheads on the left bank of the Dnipro River and achieved success in the battle for the Black Sea. The occupiers' fleet can no longer operate in the western part of the Black Sea and is forced to redeploy warships from the temporarily occupied Crimea.

Dear members of the Committee,

Despite a number of devastating defeats and growing losses in killed, Russia demonstrates readiness for the protracted war of attrition, hoping to win with the use of its still considerable resources, war fatigue and nuclear blackmail.

In revenge for its military losses on the ground, Russia continues terrorizing Ukrainian civilians by attacking critical infrastructure and residential areas with missiles, MLRS, guided aerial bombs and attack drones resulting in significant casualties and destruction. The targets of enemy attacks are mainly port infrastructure, grain warehouses, airfield network and civilian buildings, which can be considered as nothing else but violation of the laws and customs of war. In particular, on 21 November, the Russian armed forces launched another missile attack on the port infrastructure of Odesa.

The number of guided aerial bombs launched by Russians on a daily basis is growing significantly. Using them, the occupation forces are able to strike remotely, at a distance of about 50 km. While

previously these were occasional acts, now the enemy can launch up to 100 guided aerial bombs per day at the frontline areas. Such weapons are imprecise and cause heavy damage not to a specific target, but to a particular sector. Ukraine has an urgent need for appropriate means to prevent this kind of Russian attacks.

The Russian occupiers continue attacking Ukraine with Iranian-made attack drones on a daily basis. ~3,000 UAVs were used against us in the war of terror with almost 300 UAVs in October. It increases production of attack drones and accumulate them for winter attacks.

Russia has shown its true cynical and genocidal nature when, on the 25th of November, it launched its largest, 75 drone attack on Kyiv on the day of commemoration of the victims of Holodomor (the Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine).

There are no safe places in Ukraine today. Russia continues terrorising Ukrainian civilians every day and night. It shells kindergartens, schools and hospitals, destroys critical infrastructure and residential areas resulting in significant casualties all over the country.

At Kyiv alone, over the past 12 months, the Russians launched more than 300 cruise missiles of various types, 14 ballistic missiles, and almost 500 Shahed attack drones in the direction of the capital.

The geography of the airborne attacks stretches from West to East and North to South of Ukraine.

On July 6, a Russian missile hit a complex of apartment buildings in Lviv – Western part of Ukraine, 90 km from the Polish border. 10 people died, 48 were injured. Residential buildings, educational institutions, university dormitories, office premises, cars, etc were destroyed. On 5 October, Hroza Village (Kharkiv region) – 59 people, including a child, were killed as a result of a deliberate terrorist attack with Iskander-M ballistic missile on an ordinary grocery store and cafe. On 21 October, as a result of a rocket terrorist attack on a Post terminal (Nova Poshta) in Korotych Village (Kharkiv region) 6 civilians died and 17 were injured.

That is just a tip of the iceberg, I can carry on listing cases for hours.

People in Ukraine live under the constant threat of death. Children study in bomb shelters. People spend nights in subway because of missile attacks. No one knows whether they are to wake up in a bed in the morning or lying under the rubble of their house.

It's hard to imagine what it's like to see your hometown in ruins, what it's like to be frightened by loud noises because of the constant missile or fighter jet attacks.

One of our biggest concerns is of course our children. As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine enters a second year, the war continues to take a devastating toll on the lives of millions of children of my country.

Right now, over 7 million children in the country are in grave danger of physical and emotional harm, and displacement. Bombings and shelling have damaged key infrastructure such as schools, playgrounds, and hospitals, leaving many children without access to the most basic goods and services, thereby depriving them of the enjoyment of their human rights, including those relating to education, water and sanitation, health, food, and even their right to life.

510 children have been killed, 1148 wounded, 2205 went missing and 19546 deported. And these numbers do not take into account the temporarily occupied areas.

Russia continues its deliberate policy of forcible transfers and deportations of vulnerable Ukrainian children, within temporarily occupied territories and across the border with the Russian Federation. It also places them into the camps for political indoctrination, military training, and for the illegal adoption.

In Russia, Ukrainian children have their names changed and are illegally adopted. Just recently, two children from Ukraine were adopted by the family of the faction head of the Russian State Duma Mironov.

These actions fall under the definition of genocide according to the 1948 Genocide Convention and constitute a grave violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The widespread and systematic violation of the human rights of children in the context of the war against Ukraine, as well as related violations of international humanitarian law, must be stopped, those responsible must be held to account, and the victims, including Ukraine's children, must have access to remedy and redress.

To address this problem the «Bring Kids Back UA» platform was initiated by the President of Ukraine. The strategic action plan unites the efforts of the Government, partner countries, international organisations, and civil society to trace, identify, repatriate and care for all illegally deported by Russia Ukrainian children. Besides the obvious goal of reuniting Ukrainian families and giving back those children their lives, the programme also aims to provide the ICC in the Hague with facts and proven information they need to prosecute the criminals responsible for these illegal deportations.

For this purpose, Canada has proposed the creation of an international coalition of countries to help return Ukrainian children abducted by Russia. This initiative will continue "Bring Kids Back UA" action plan.

The First Meeting of the International Coalition of Countries for the Return of Ukrainian Children is to be held in Kyiv on 8 December.

Dear members of the Committee,

Another huge treat to the world is Russia's nuclear blackmail.

Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) still remains under Russia's control.

On 1 December due to the incompetence of the Russian invaders and Rosatom employees ZNPP lost off-site power and temporarily relied on emergency diesel generators for the electricity it needs to cool its reactors and for other essential nuclear safety and security functions. The ZNPP lost the connection to both of its external power lines – the eighth time that Europe's largest nuclear power plant suffered a complete off-site power outage during the military conflict, heightening concerns about nuclear safety and security. This data is confirmed by the IAEA inspectors.

On 29 September, during the 67th session of the IAEA General Conference, 69 countries supported the resolution on immediate return of the ZNPP under the full control of Ukraine. Demonstrating its

complete disregard for demands of the international community that call upon to immediately withdraw military and other personnel from the ZNPP, Russia has prepared everything for a terrorist attack at this Plant with radiation leakage.

On 25 October Russia most probably tried to target Ukraine's Khmelnytsky Nuclear Power Plant (KhNPP) with drones. It failed but brought damage to buildings in towns of Netyshyn and Slavuta in Khmelnytsky region and temporarily cut power to some off-site radiation monitoring stations.

Russia is the only such state in the world that fired tanks at the premises of a nuclear power plant. No one else made the nuclear plant a test site for storing weapons and shells. Russia is covering itself with a nuclear plant to shell our cities with jet artillery. If anyone in the world is still able to ignore Russia's other war crimes, such a crime against humanity must certainly motivate everyone to action.

Russia must be ousted from the international nuclear energy market. Sanctions on Rosatom, the personal ones at first and on Russian nuclear fuel and technologies later, must be imposed.

That is what we Ukrainians say - the nation that had to survive the Chernobyl radiation disaster in 1986. A part of our land is still a closed zone - a zone of exclusion.

Dear members of the Committee,

The Russian military and state authorities are well known for having committed many deliberate attacks against civilian targets, massacres of civilians, torture and rape of women and children, torture and mutilation of Ukrainian prisoners of war, and indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas. Today they are using prohibited tactics of war by weaponizing food. As you all are aware, on 17 July, Russia withdrew from the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) and started attacking Ukrainian ports storing grain intended for export. This initiative plays a vital role in stabilizing global food markets, ensuring food supplies to vulnerable populations, and promoting humanitarian assistance efforts.

As a result of massive attacks since Russia's withdrawal from BSGI, Ukraine suffered a reduction in the export potential of its ports by 40%, and nearly 300,000 tons of grain were destroyed. The export of grain cargoes to the countries of Asia, Africa and Europe was reduced by almost 3 mln tons per month.

We know that the lives of about 400 million people around the world depend on Ukrainian food exports. That is why, even in these difficult times, Ukraine remains a guarantor of global food security.

The international community understands the importance of a consistent food supply to those in need. 34 countries, including Ireland, joined the "Grain from Ukraine" program launched by President Zelenskyy.

The "Grain from Ukraine" program raised >200 mln USD in donations and sent 170,000 tons of wheat to Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, and Kenya. Ukraine intends to send more ships with humanitarian grain to African countries: 25,000 tons to Nigeria, 32,000 tons to Sudan and 12,500 tons to Somalia.

Never again should hunger become a weapon against the freedom of people. And anyone who tries to use hunger in such a way, anyone whose terror creates chaos in the food market, must be held accountable before the entire world. Russia must be held accountable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last winter, Moscow's drones and missiles zeroed in on Ukraine's power grid, hoping to erode the country's will to resist Russia's invasion by denying civilians heating. Such attacks on the objects of civilian infrastructure are a clear weaponization of the cold season by Russia and an attempt to increase casualties among the civil population of Ukraine.

Now, Russia is getting ready for a new wave of terror against Ukraine's energy sector ahead of the winter season.

We appreciate all the assistance already provided by countries around the globe last winter. However, people in Ukraine are still in mortal danger of literally freezing to death this winter if we do not have enough components to fix the damage to the energy system.

Ukraine plans to become one of the key suppliers of clean electricity and green hydrogen to Europe. That will guarantee real energy stability based on decentralized energy generation and distribution. When European countries receive carbon-neutral Ukrainian electricity, they consume less Russian coal and gas. That is one of the reasons for Russian attacks on our energy system. Ukraine can replace billions of cubic meters of Russian gas with its electricity.

Dear members of the Committee,

I just mentioned Ukraine's energy system that is a target for Russia. However, it is only a fraction of the immense amount of destruction that Russia brought to Ukraine.

The devastation caused by Russia to Ukraine is currently estimated at 411 bln USD. In 2023, Ukraine's rapid recovery needs remain at up to 15 bln USD. Its priorities include rebuilding infrastructure, housing and transportation, economic development of communities, job creation, and business opportunities in the liberated areas.

The UN, in cooperation with the Government of Ukraine, the World Bank and the EU, has initiated a third rapid assessment of Ukraine's damage and needs, which will determine investment priorities for recovery and reconstruction for the year ahead. We count on Ireland to be on board and provide substantial assistance in Ukraine's recovery.

Key sources of financing include confiscated Russian funds, direct allocations from the Ukrainian state budget, funds from international partners, and donor funds across the globe.

All the Russian assets that are blocked today (~300-500 bln USD) should be the priority for the restoration of Ukraine and compensation for the damage. Belgium has become the first country to launch the practice of using frozen Russian assets for security assistance to our country and for fast recovery projects.

We strongly believe that Ireland can employ the Belgian practices and put the 1.8 billion euros of Russian assets frozen in Ireland towards the financial assistance to Ukraine.

Despite the legal and practical challenges, confiscation and use of frozen Russian assets is a way to hold Russia accountable for its invasion of Ukraine. It provides compensation for damages to Ukraine, deters future aggression, promotes accountability, strengthens the rule of law, reduces Russia's financial resources, and restores legitimacy to the international system.

When we talk about recovery, we are talking about millions of jobs, billions of company profits and trillions of GDP. And not only for Ukraine but for all European countries. This will also be crucial in providing the basis for all Ukrainians who were forced to leave Ukraine to come back home.

Ukraine's economy is showing resilience, adapting to the war and recovering faster than previously predicted: the adjusted forecast envisages GDP growth of up to 4,9%, while inflation will reach 5,8% for 2023.

Now, let me bring your attention to the importance of sanctions against Russia.

Despite the efforts of the international community, the Russian state still manages to acquire technologies and equipment (chips, microcircuits, etc.) through a network of suppliers and circumvent the international sanctions regime.

The analysis of independent investigations shows that the circumvention of export sanctions on Russia amounted to an astonishing 8 billion euros in 2022. Western businesses use third countries to sell their products to Russia. In addition, there is still no ban on Russian liquified gas that comes to Europe.

More joint work is needed to combat any forms and schemes by which Russia is circumventing sanctions or earns on selling its natural resources. Any money and supplies to Russia that allow it to increase military production must be stopped. This is in the clear interest not only of Ukraine but also everyone in the world who wants to see a speedy end to this war. That is why we expect decisive steps towards this aim in the 12th EU package of sanctions.

In addition, we urge the Financial Action Task Force to take further actions against Russia's increasing risks to international financial security and to have a stronger response to the Kremlin's blatant violations of FATF standards. We also address applying increased scrutiny to any Russia-linked transactions, given the increasing risks they pose to the international financial system. The longer we go without countering this threat, the more we invite the Kremlin to intensify illicit activities, finance terrorist entities and engage in illegal arms trading.

Dear members of the Committee,

Almost everything becomes a weapon in Russian hands. And information is not an exception. Russia uses propaganda, disinformation, and misinformation to justify its malicious deeds.

As we live in the times of hybrid warfare when manipulation of information fuels narratives that are creating fear, distrust in governments and social unrest across societies, we thought it is absolutely essential to raise awareness about the danger and influence of Russian disinformation and propaganda on people and societies in Ireland, in Europe and across the Atlantic and to present best practices of countering such manipulations by Ukraine, Ireland, EU countries and the United States.

For this purpose, the Embassy of Ukraine in cooperation with the EC Representation and the US Embassy held a symposium in Dublin entitled "How Russian Propaganda and Disinformation Impacts Societies Worldwide" that brought together experts, journalists and researchers from Ukraine, Ireland, the EU and the USA.

Quite a lot has been said, but one message is clear - Russia has become a global champion in the craft of spreading lies and creating deep fakes, which reach to the minds of ordinary people not only inside one country, but across Europe and the world.

That is something that definitely has to be dealt with. And we strongly believe that we have to do it together.

As we all see, Dear members of the Committee, Russian meaning of “peace” is completely opposite to a peace as the civilized world sees it.

What we propose is Ukraine’s Peace Formula that is, to our strongest belief, remains the only realistic and comprehensive plan to restore Ukraine's territorial integrity and to guarantee security and justice for the entire international community. Its 10 points were reflected in the UN GA Resolution «UN Charter principles underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine» adopted on 23 February 2023 by 141 votes.

The Peace Formula is gradually gaining the support of the world. It is universal in its nature and can create a basis not only to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, but also to end other armed conflicts on the planet and overcome global problems.

We are grateful to Ireland for joining the process of implementation of the Peace Formula, in particular 3 out of 10 of its points. They are: Radiation and Nuclear Safety, Food Security and Restoration of Justice.

In order to implement the Peace Formula, the Ukrainian side holds meetings with Ambassadors accredited to Ukraine. Also, three meetings of national security and foreign policy advisors were held. And we are grateful to Ireland for getting on board of this process by participating in the third meeting in Valletta (Malta) on 28 October.

In October in close cooperation with the Department of Foreign Affairs we held a symposium entitled “Ensuring Accountability and Justice for International Crimes Committed by Russia in Ukraine”, which brought together academics and practitioners from Ukraine, Germany, Australia as well as representatives of the Eurojust and the Council of Europe. To sum up on the event I would say that a lot of work on restoration of justice has already been done, including establishment of ICPA (International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime) and work of the Core Group, where Ireland also takes part. Now we need to establish a Special Tribunal on the crime of aggression, which is to fill the jurisdictional gap of the International Criminal Court.

We are grateful to Ireland for supporting us on the track of Restoration of Justice by participating in the Core Group of countries on the establishing of the Special Tribunal.

Dear members of the Committee,

However, the war for our existence is the priority for us, we also put as much efforts in fulfilling our European integration aspirations.

We’d like to thank Ireland for its persistent support of the Ukraine’s path to the full membership in the EU.

Ukrainians have been committed to its European integration course for 10 years since the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, followed by Russia’s occupation of parts of Ukrainian territories. During all these years, eight of the low-intensity war and almost two of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian political elites and society have been modernizing and transforming the country. Gradually aligning its legislation with European norms and standards. Ukraine has been demonstrating not only resilience, but a capacity to prepare the country for EU membership.

All this has been taking place under Russia's continuing missile and drone attacks and bloody battles on the frontline. Any candidate country has never had such an experience, and we wish no one would ever have. At the same time, Ukraine believes that the decision to start EU accession negotiations should be merit-based. Ukraine is not asking for "political concessions". We have created a strong basis for the EU's positive decision to open accession negotiations.

Opening the accession negotiations will be an important, timely, and merit-based sign of support for the Ukrainian people fighting for their independence and for their democratic and prosperous European future simultaneously. It is crucial both for maintaining momentum in reforms and in the context of the country's immediate recovery and reconstruction.

We clearly understand that we are only at the beginning of the path to full-fledged EU membership and are committed to further transformations. In 2023, the Ukrainian Government conducted the self-screening of the adaptation of national legislation to EU law to effectively go through the official screening. To meet all the criteria defined by the EU, Ukraine is already elaborating a detailed Plan for the implementation of all the European Commission's recommendations for 2024.

Given Ukraine's significant progress in implementation of the EC seven recommendations for just 16 months, which was recognized by the EC Enlargement Package on November 8, 2023, we expect the European Council's political decision to start accession negotiations with Ukraine at its meeting on December 14-15.

We are grateful to Ireland for advocating Ukraine's EU candidate status and rely on further support.

We must admit that what Russia does in Ukraine is not just a Ukrainian problem. This is a challenge for everyone. As Ukraine fights for democracy, freedom and European values, the world must be united to stop Russian aggression as soon as possible and minimise its destructive consequences.

What Ukraine needs is to receive credible security guarantees. Putin's disregard for all international agreements makes it impossible for Kyiv to rely on the documents like 1994 Budapest Memorandum, which turned out to be worthless. Due to this Memorandum Ukraine has given away to Russia its second biggest in Europe nuclear arsenal, just to face those arms being used against us by the Memorandum's side.

Ukraine started negotiations with the US, the UK, Canada, Japan, France, Netherlands and Germany as well as agreed to start working with Sweden and Norway on bilateral documents on security guarantees.

The world has to unite and join its efforts in helping Ukraine to defeat Russian menace to the globe.

In conclusion, Ladies and gentlemen, I want to stress that we must ensure that in the coming future, there will be no war anywhere in Europe. No other city in Europe will live through what all the cities and villages of Ukraine are experiencing. We must be united and work to the full capacity so that only Russia's ambitions be a ruin, not our countries, not our cities. We must make it possible. And we'll do it! We must win!

Go raibh maith agat!