

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ AN AONTAIS EORPAIGH

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN UNION AFFAIRS

Dé Céadaoin, 25 Bealtaine 2022

Wednesday, 25 May 2022

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 9.30 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

Teachtaí Dála/Deputies	Seanadóirí/Senators
John Brady,	Lisa Chambers,
Dara Calleary,	
Francis Noel Duffy,	Sharon Keogan,
Seán Haughey,	Vincent P. Martin.
Brendan Howlin,	
Ruairí Ó Murchú,	
Neale Richmond.	

+ In éagmais le haghaidh cuid den choiste/In the absence for part of the meeting of Lisa Chambers

Teachta/Deputy Joe McHugh sa Chathaoir/in the Chair.

The joint committee met in private session at 9.33 a.m., suspended at 9.44 a.m., and resumed in public session at 10.01 a.m.

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Engagement with Ukrainian Ambassador and the Chair of the EU Committee of the Ukrainian Parliament

Chairman: The purpose of today's meeting is to continue our ongoing engagement on the major issue of the day: the war in Ukraine. The committee has for many weeks held discussion on issues such as the humanitarian crisis, the EU response to the war and the EU applications of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Last month, a delegation from the committee travelled to Romania and Moldova on a fact finding mission to view the situation on the ground in two European countries at the forefront of the humanitarian crisis caused by the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. I am delighted to say that we will continue that work. We want to keep this issue on the radar and we are aware of the importance of that.

I am delighted to welcome Ms Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze, chair of the EU committee of the Ukrainian Parliament. I also welcome the ambassador of Ukraine, H.E. Ms Larysa Gerasko. She is busy; she was at a fundraiser last night. It was good to see her there. It is good to have her back and we look forward to today's engagement. As son an choiste, cuirim fáilte rompu chuig an gcruinniú. On behalf of the committee, I welcome our guests.

All witnesses are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of the person or entity. Therefore, if a statement of a witness is potentially defamatory in respect of an identifiable person or entity, the witness will be directed to discontinue these remarks. It is imperative that he or she complies with any such direction. I think the members of the committee know the drill in terms of the rules on being in the Leinster House complex.

We will start with opening remarks from a fellow chair, speaking from Davos, Ms Klymush-Tsintsadze.

Ms Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze: Chair, members, and Her Excellency, the ambassador, I am first and foremost very grateful for the opportunity to talk with you directly. I also want to underline my gratitude to our ambassador of Ukraine, H.E. Ms Larysa Gerasko, for doing such a great job by connecting us and helping to facilitate this dialogue between the parliaments.

I am joining the committee from Davos. The World Economic Forum is definitely focusing on a lot of issue such as security, geopolitics, and specifically on Russia's war against Ukraine. We are privileged to have the possibility of several of our Members of Parliament and members of the Government to be here to continue explaining what is happening and encouraging support for the country.

On behalf of the Ukrainian people who I represent as a parliamentarian, I wish to express our wholehearted gratitude to the Irish people and politicians for the warm welcome they have given to Ukrainians seeking refuge. I have heard that Ireland has increased its population by 1% by welcoming approximately 30,000 Ukrainians. We are grateful for that and we hope that by Ukraine winning, with the support of the free world, those Ukrainians will have a warm wel-

come back home and the possibility to return to their houses if they are preserved or to rebuild houses once this sad, terrible and most barbaric war is over.

As the committee members know, unfortunately, there is no safe place in Ukraine at this time. We are not only threatened but we are being shelled and pounded upon, killed, tortured, deported from the occupied territories and our children are being abducted. The atrocities that Russia has visited upon our land are absolutely inhumane and horrible to even imagine. I call this war a war between the world and anti-world, humanity and anti-humanity. I believe what is happening to be totally illogical. Free world nations and free people are standing up with Ukraine, but we need to sustain this support. It does not get any easier each day. That is something I feel here in Davos, unfortunately, in that there is a willingness by some politicians, states, and analysts to try to push Ukraine into making concessions or find compromises at the expense of Ukraine, as opposed to continuing to help us further and the need to understand and verify for themselves that the values being defended are real-world values that matter and are important.

Chairman: I apologise for interrupting Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze. There seems to be some noise in the background. I ask everyone who is present at the meeting online to mute their equipment because we are hearing some interference. It seems to be coming from the background, or maybe from Davos.

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: It might be coming from Davos because it is hard to find a totally lonely spot here.

Chairman: We are okay if Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze is okay.

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: It is important to understand that the values being defended are really important. It is not only about values. We are all being tested how serious we are about our principles, our beliefs and most basic things such as freedom and democracy.

As the committee members probably already understand, Russia is trying to erase us from the map of the world, as a nation and state. One of the major reasons it is trying to punish us is because we want to build our own country according to our own vision that would be democratic and, in the future, a fully-fledged member of the European Union and Euro-Atlantic community, and would have the possibility to develop according to the best practices which the free nations have been showing the world. Russia totally opposes our right to not only build a European future for Ukraine but also the right to live in this particular moment. That is why it is extremely important for us, for Ukrainian people, 93% of whom support the European integration path for Ukraine. More recently, there has been a clear signal from the EU in the decision to be taken in June to give us EU candidate status. I wish to underline how grateful we are for Ireland's clear and dedicated stance on that matter. I take this opportunity to reach out to the members of the committee and ask them to do their utmost in talking to sceptical colleagues in other countries. Unfortunately, not everybody is on board at this moment. I ask them to try to persuade them that we should not be hiding behind legalities but should take this political decision already now because that is the inspiration for Ukrainian people, that we will have the possibility to transform our country in accordance with European-----

(Interruptions).

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: -----dream that, with our work, after the end of this war and the victory of Ukraine, it will become possible for us to get through. It is very important

that this strategic ambiguity on Ukraine's European perspective from some of the European Union member states is dissolved. We are trying our best but Ireland's voice, arguments and explanations to its colleagues would be crucial in that and so I am calling on it to help us to get this first important stage done.

With regard to the war, unfortunately this night was not the exception. Again, some civilian targets in Pryvillia and Zaporizhzhia have been hit. Fierce fighting is ongoing in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as the Kharkiv and Kherson regions. Air alerts are threatening the whole country. That means we are very much dependent on the instruments to fight back. I know about the military neutrality of Ireland but I appreciate all the non-lethal aid it has been giving Ukraine. It is very much needed so our incredibly brave, courageous and professional armed forces will be protected. We are also reaching out to all the nations that can give us heavy weaponry to do that as fast as possible because time matters and time means the lives of civilians. You cannot defend your country bare-handed. That is why that is another very important issue for us.

On top of military support, we appreciate it when nations take a political stance. That is exactly what Ireland is doing. I am watching how Switzerland is redefining its neutrality by going from active neutrality to co-operative neutrality. That is very important in terms of those sanctions that it has joined. It is heartbreaking for us to watch how the sixth package of sanctions is not being adopted and is still being postponed. One of the countries of the EU, irrespective of the basic value written in the European agreement on solidarity, is violating that basic principle of solidarity value. I will be blunt about this. It is holding hostage the full decision of the EU on starting the process of embargoing Russian oil and cutting off Russian banks from SWIFT. I believe we need all Russian banks to be cut off from SWIFT. Only then will those sanctions really work because many people are using the loopholes in sanctions to avoid them. Gazprombank is one example. I am appalled by the decision that German and Italian companies can pay through Gazprombank in rubles for the energy resources. That is totally wrong and is in discontent with all the sanctions that have already been adopted. We know that, unfortunately, Russia is buying weaponry through Gazprombank, paying salaries to its soldiers to continue killing us Ukrainians and continuing its terrorist activities in the territory of Ukraine.

(Interruptions).

Ms Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze: Every single argument that could be found and used internally in discussions to carry on sanctions and pressure Russia additionally is of extreme importance.

We are grateful that Ireland has made the decision not to let Russian ships into its ports but another step has to be taken not to let in ships under different flags carrying Russian trade products. That is also of huge importance because what Russia is doing right now is stealing. For example, in the occupied territories, it is stealing our grain and our agricultural equipment and selling, or trying to sell, our stolen products - like looters - to other nations using different ships and so on. It is hard to comprehend the scope of the crimes Russia is carrying out or even count them on all ten fingers because the variety is very big. There are also some assets of Russian affiliates registered with the International Financial Services Centre in Dublin. I am kindly asking the members, as politicians, to engage with their Government and see how those assets could be frozen and then seized. They could then potentially be transferred or repaid to Ukrainians who have lost their homes, their loved ones or their health when they were wounded and so on. That is why I am saying we need sanctions to pressure Russia.

We have to understand it is not Putin who is fighting this war against us. It is the collective responsibility of the Russian Federation. Russia must be weakened to the extent that it is not capable of carrying out additional attacks on Ukraine or starting any other war in the whole world, which it was doing before this. It was showing off to the world with its credible strong response. Russia understands the language of power, unity and strength. It is provoked by weak reactions. That is what has been happening over decades, unfortunately, with the Russian attack on Georgia, Russian engagement in Syria, and the initial attack back in 2014 on Crimea and on the east of Ukraine. I hope we will not make this mistake again and that the lessons learnt are being exercised and carried out at this moment by many nations. Together we will be able to ensure that the “Never again” we repeated after the Second World War will actually become never again. As of this point in time, that is not there. Obviously, here in Davos we are discussing the issue of the potential food crisis imposed on the world because of the Russian war against Ukraine. Approximately 22 million tonnes of Ukrainian grain is currently stored in Ukraine, which shows our capacity to feed 400 million people a year. Unfortunately, at present, with all the improvements we can make on our western border, using the rail network, lorries and ground transportation through Europe and on to the European port of Gdansk and ports in Lithuania, we can only increase our exports by 30%. That will not solve the issue. That would mean we would need six years to export everything in terms of crops that we have. We will have the new harvest in July, which means we will have to destroy some of the crops we already have because we do not have the facilities to store them. That will happen at a time when people in northern Africa and Middle Eastern countries, who are dependent on our exports of these products, might face real hunger. There is an urgent need to unblock the sea route from the Pivdennyi Port near Odesa through the engagement of the international community in order for Ukrainians to export these crops to ensure we deter the possibility of a food crisis. We do not have a solution to that issue yet but it is another very important topic on which we need to concentrate.

I would like to finish my remarks by thanking Ireland, along with almost 40 other nations, for filing a claim to the International Criminal Court, ICC, of Russian war crimes on the territory of Ukraine. We in Ukraine sincerely believe this war must be ended with Russian defeat and isolation, and definitely with Russia’s punishment. Therefore, it is very important that we are currently working on documenting and registering all the war crimes against humanity that have been revealed to the world after the liberating of some of the areas that were occupied by Russians near Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy and Kharkiv. Unfortunately there have been many Buchas around Ukraine that have been done by the so-called armed forces. I cannot call them the armed forces of the Russian Federation because they are violating every single convention that foresaw rules of engagement for war times. This is one track but we must also ensure Russia is punished and prosecuted for the war and crime of aggression. That means a separate tribunal, a Nuremburg mark 2 would have to be set up. That would require much common effort by many nations. We are counting on Irish engagement and support in this endeavour.

I understand Ireland’s contribution to the de-mining of lands through UN missions has been incredible. Unfortunately, approximately 300 sq km of new minefields, including agricultural fields that have been mined deliberately by the Russian Federation, are in dire need of urgent de-mining. Ireland’s expertise, training and equipment in that regard would be extremely important. I would like the committee to also consider that possibility in addition to its humanitarian and financial aid, which are still very much needed. We appreciate what Ireland has already done in that respect by pledging money to the European Peace Facility to direct financial support for Ukraine. Even in these dire times we are thinking of the recovery of Ukraine and how to approach that in the best way in order that it would be a transparent process of engagement of

other countries who are ready to provide additional support but also ensuring we use this drastic and most painful time as an opportunity to rebuild Ukraine as a better place in the centre and at the heart of Europe. I will stop on that point as it is much more important to hear members' questions and engage in direct communication through questions and answers or members' comments.

Chairman: I thank Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze for that very blunt and sobering assessment of the current situation, for outlining its direct impact on her people in Ukraine and the indirect impact of creating a potential food shortage and the implications of that. We will try to keep the conversation flowing. Deputies Richmond, Howlin, Ó Murchú and Brady have indicated. I will take those contributions first. I welcome Mr. Barry Andrews, MEP, to today's meeting. If he would like to contribute during his Fianna Fáil colleagues' time slot, I will be happy to let him speak first but his colleagues have the right to speak first. Mr. Andrews is very welcome and has a good interest in this area. If members have a few questions they can direct them to the Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs, Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze, or to the Ukrainian ambassador, Ms Larysa Gerasko. They can involve both of them.

Deputy Neale Richmond: I thank madam chairperson, Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze, for those very sobering remarks. There is much to cover there. Many of the questions and points from our end may come across as a bit frivolous when we know the chairperson and the ambassador and their fellow country people are living under this horrible attack and brutal war. To bring the engagement back to a slightly more procedural matter on the hopeful accession of Ukraine to the EU as speedily as possible, Ireland is one of the countries that has stated in the EU that we want to see this happen quickly, not in ten or 20 years like other larger member states have negatively said. From a parliamentary point of view, what work had been done prior to the war in preparing Ukraine for accession? What assistance would be needed from EU member states in terms of some form of Marshall fund but also to ensure that we, as parliamentarians, in a sympathetic member state can do our best and utmost to ensure that swift accession? I will leave it at that as I know members have a range of questions.

Chairman: Does Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze wish to take that question?

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Yes. Ukraine experienced serious difficulty in breaking through with our European integration plan. It was the negative decision of the previous authorities under President Yanukovich not to sign the association agreement that triggered the Revolution of Dignity and it was only after that, with the great losses, we had the chance to sign the association agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, DCFTA. Then, we, as opposed to any other state in the world, had to go through the process of having a referendum on the ratification of the association agreement in the Netherlands. We learned a year later that with the harsh involvement of the Russian Federation there, the results were negative for Ukraine. We even had difficulties in terms of having it ratified, even though I think Ukrainian people deserved it more than anybody else. Since 2014, before its ratification, we have said that the association agreement should be implemented. Along with that, we started work on a set of reforms enabling Ukrainians to travel visa-free. All of that ensures that we are definitely not starting from scratch on the issue of accession to the EU. We are much closer together. We redirected our trade and more than 44% of our exports were to the EU before the full-scale invasion. We have been successful in a quite a lot of transformation by meeting many of the important criteria on the path. We are not starting from ground zero, as it were. However, there is a lot that will definitely have to be done. I believe that our recovery plan has to be about recovery and transformation. It has to be a recovery and reform plan. The funding that will

have to be provided to Ukraine through financial aid, lines of credit and investment will also have to be topped with financial assistance for the reform agenda that is still very much needed in Ukraine. While we have been successful, for example, in setting up the anti-corruption institutions, in order for those institutions to deliver on their tasks efficiently, they will have to go through a period when they are tested in action. Some will probably have to be fine-tuned to an extent. We also have a lot to deliver on in ensuring that the rule of law in Ukraine is exemplary in the future. There are many other areas in which we need best practices that could be brought with EU expertise and direct engagement with Ukraine.

On the Marshall Plan, as far as I understand it, it has been decided that it will be known as the “Brussels Plan for Ukraine”. It will be very similar to the Marshall Plan that was introduced after the Second World War. It is good that we are already thinking about it. The Marshall Plan was introduced three years after the end of the Second World War. If we are thinking about a similar plan for Ukraine now, we can include the most important deliverables for Ukraine. It will be important for that to be felt by the Ukrainian people. With regard to numbers, we can probably talk about numbers now but unfortunately we are experiencing additional losses to the economy and infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, universities, places of cultural heritage, people’s homes and multistorey buildings, every single day. Unfortunately, those numbers are going to grow. We will only understand what kind of allocations will be needed for Ukraine after the end of the war. We are definitely looking at the numbers, not only as aid and credit, as I said. Investment policies will also provide a big opportunity for other countries to develop sectors in Ukraine that they might be best at. The Ukrainian Government is asking other countries to consider what sectors of the economy they would like to focus on as part of the future recovery. The Ukrainian Government is also suggesting that each EU country works with a particular region or area in Ukraine as part of the recovery plan. The plan is in the making. I am sure that the ambassador has all the materials that have already been prepared for the recovery plan. From my perspective, I will end on the point on which I started, namely, that recovery has to be tied to a reform agenda. I do not think that two parallel tracks will be the right way to go.

Chairman: I call Deputy Howlin followed by Deputy Ó Murchú.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Like others, I thank Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze for the very comprehensive, sobering and accurate assessment of the situation. I wish to make a brief comment and ask two questions. First, it is important that we express, as a committee representing all parties in our Parliament, our total solidarity with Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze and her parliamentary colleagues in facing the absolutely shocking and unjustified assault on their country by the Russian Federation. On Ukraine’s application for membership of the EU, I think Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze accurately reflected Ireland’s very strong support of it. The visit of the Speaker of our Parliament and the Chair of the Senate to Kyiv last weekend was undertaken not only to support Ukraine, but to be advocates across the EU. I think that should be stated.

As to my two questions, the issue of the export of grain is a critical one, as Russia now uses food as a weapon of war and starvation as a threat to the world. Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze was very sanguine, almost pessimistic, in terms of what can be done to export Ukrainian grain. They are saying that the rail routes could only export some 30% of the grain. Is there a possibility and what can be done at an EU level to ensure that the grain that is there and which is vitally needed by hungry people across the globe can be exported? What do we need to do internationally to provide safe corridors for the transport of grain? Do the witnesses’ have a view on that?

My second question relates to our visit to Romania and Moldova as a parliamentary com-

mittee, which was eye-opening for all of us. One of the places we visited was Palanca in southern Moldova, which is the crossing point that is closest to Odesa. I would be interested in hearing the witnesses' assessment of the following. There was a real fear that if Odesa was assaulted by the Russian Federation, there would be a mass exodus into Moldova, which would overwhelm it, and we wondered how that would be dealt with. Do the witnesses have a view on the conduct of the war in terms of the vulnerability of Odesa and that southern corridor across the Black Sea?

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Yes, with regard to food prices. With regard to export routes, we must do everything that can be done and undertake all possible engagement at the European level, in terms of perhaps bringing the UN on board, in trying to negotiate safe borders with the Russian Federation for exports. I think that from the diplomatic standpoint, that is probably the only option. However, Russia is bargaining and blackmailing and trying to insist that some of the sanctions against it have to be lifted in order for any exports to be made from Ukraine. I would not dismiss the channel of insistence through the UN instruments. However, at the same time, even if we did that, it would involve removing mines from the sea area. There are Ukrainian mines that are protecting the Port of Odesa and Russian mines that are in place as part of its assault on the Ukrainian sea borders. That is in full and total violation of the law of the sea. Irrespective of any obligations, Russia is behaving that way. That means an additional demining effort, including a sea demining effort. It also foresees specific sea convoys that would work on convoying these exports. There are a lot of components to that. I am pessimistic because none of the efforts that have been made in that direction so far have produced any result. Russia has been blowing up the humanitarian corridors for people to leave the cities. It does not care. It has blown up the vehicles of members of the civilian population as they have tried to get to refuge. That is why I am very sceptical about that and about how Russia will behave.

Other important aspects have to be borne in mind. Since we do not have enough storage facilities, that could be an additional thing that might be worked on directly with the Ukrainian Government by bringing in some of the temporary possibilities for storage facilities in order that we could store some of the new crops and maybe engage in some processing on the territory of Ukraine. That could help the future of our exports. Those are practical details. I am sure our agriculture minister could go into that much more precisely.

I had a separate meeting here in Davos with the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova. Moldova had prepared to receive a maximum of about 15,000 Ukrainian refugees. This is not to mention that almost 400,000 have gone through Moldovan territory, but now the Moldovan people are hosting 95,000 Ukrainian refugees in their homes. Moldova is hosting maybe 3,000 to 4,000 people in the facilities it has prepared for refugees but, even without the limited capacity of this country, Moldova has been doing a great job of welcoming Ukrainians. For Moldova, the number is not proportional. There is a huge number of refugees now in the country. There may be another wave of refugees because of the assault on Odesa. Unfortunately, as committee members have probably noticed, the air attacks on Odesa and the surrounding region are continuous. Some of the destruction is, unfortunately, happening in the city, which is very symbolic for the Russian Federation in its sick and twisted perception of history. Russia ties the city to some imperial Russian greatness. This war is about the restoration of Russian Empire as the Russian Government understands it. It does not matter what the name is. Putin sees the dissolution of the Soviet Union as the most drastic mistake of the 20th century. Therefore, I do not think the Russians have given up the idea of attacking either Odesa or Kyiv, so it is entirely possible that a new wave of refugees will

come through that area.

Moreover, we have to understand that in Transnistria, this non-recognised territory that has been cut off from Moldova for a couple of decades, there are, I think, about 1,300 Russian troops stationed at the moment. They are on high alert. Moreover, there is a big base there, a big military storage facility, that they are threatening to blow up. That could be a huge disaster for the region on various terms, including ecological terms. Therefore, the threat is there. Moldova should be given additional help in its efforts to be ready as at least a transit country for those people who might need to find further refuge.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I thank Madam Chair, Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze. I reiterate what everyone else has said about the solidarity there needs to be with Ukraine, which is dealing with an absolutely abominable invasion by Russia, something none of us expected to happen. We are in a very different place now from where we were a few months ago. This being the EU affairs committee, Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze has already dealt with the piece of work on EU candidacy and reorientation of Ukraine's set-up, that is, the economy combined with reforms. That will be very difficult to follow through on in the middle of a war. Obviously, we are in complete support of EU candidacy for Ukraine. When we deal with a necessary Marshall plan of rebuilding, as is hoped, at the end of the conflict, we will also need to ensure the correct resources and proper facilitation. Sometimes I think there has been a failure on the part of the European Union to provide a proper roadmap for accession. That is a piece we need to work on. We have had unhelpful commentary recently, particularly from France, that does not help the situation.

Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze dealt with the wider issue of food security. I would ask questions about Ukraine's energy security and the supply chains. I would also ask about the issue of sanctions. We have seen the difficulty in getting the last and the next round of sanctions into play. It is a question of what Ukraine wants to see from those sanctions. Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze has dealt with some of that, including in respect of SWIFT, and we can all make guesses about fuel, but what exactly needs to happen? As much as everyone prefers that there is multilateralism and agreement at European level, that might not always be necessary. The European Union has carried out a number of co-operative actions recently, even through the pandemic, on an opt-in basis. In an awful lot of cases people opted in, so we might be looking at that into the future. Again, it is a matter of Ukraine's view on that, particularly the sanctions.

Mr. Shchedrin has responsibility for trade, does he not?

Mr. Dmytro Shchedrin: Yes, I do.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I apologise. I was to follow up on that.

The last time Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze was before us, she spoke about the list of companies, provided to the Department of Foreign Affairs, that were still trading with Russia. Where is that? We have had a lot of sanctions and a lot of things have changed since that.

I will leave it at that. I may come in again afterwards. I do not want to hog the entire meeting. I have a tendency to do that so I apologise.

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: With regard to sanctions and energy security, we can not only be part of the problem, but part of the solution. It is important to understand that, having decoupled from the Russian grids and connected to the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity, ENTSO-E, system, Ukraine can, even now, export electricity

to the European Union. The urgent ENTSO-E connection envisaged that there would not be a commercial flow of electricity from Ukraine to the European Union but that can, and should, be reconsidered because, while the supply is not a lot at the moment, we can supply 3% of the European Union's needs, that is, we can supply electricity to substitute for some of the gas consumed. It is important to understand that there are some possibilities here that have not been exploited yet.

In the context of oil, we are experiencing extreme shortages of gasoline and diesel because Russia has totally destroyed our refinery capacity and deliberately targeted our storage facilities across the country, regardless of whether they were state- or privately owned. We are now looking for options to get more of the fuels that we need through the bottleneck on the western part of our border, which is also a life vein for us. We need these fuels first and foremost for our agriculture sector and armed forces but we also need them for all of the other parts of the economy. We need to be capable of relying on the supply for our people to live. That is another area where the engagement of the committee is very much needed, that is, in trying to secure further volumes to meet those urgent needs of Ukraine. That is where we are.

We are still transporting Russian gas to the European Union. Obviously, we would very much like to cut that dependency on transportation to zero, but that would require other sanctions. The EU is now discussing an oil embargo but we see how much difficulty there is with gas. As we have heard from many colleagues, a gas embargo is obviously far from being apprehended as a clear possibility. Europe has to look at a target of zero dependency on Russian energy sources. The mistakes that have been made in recent decades in increasing the dependency of certain European countries on Russian energy resources are now being paid for. We definitely understand it will take time to introduce a gas embargo but it is the major thing that has to be achieved. I do not see the sixth package, if and when it is agreed, being the last package that would need to be introduced against the monstrous aggressor that is the Russian Federation.

Chairman: I call Deputy Brady.

Deputy John Brady: Did the ambassador want to come in there? No. I am sorry; I thought she had indicated.

Chairman: Does Mr. Shchedrin wish to come in?

Mr. Dmytro Shchedrin: With regard to the Deputy's question on the Irish companies that were working in Russia at the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine, as far as we know, the major Irish companies that were present have either stopped their work there completely or are in the process of stopping and selling their assets. I would like to come back to the Department of Foreign Affairs to check if we are on the same page as to the complete list of such companies before coming back to the Deputy, if he does not mind.

Deputy John Brady: Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze and the ambassador are again very welcome before our committee. Unfortunately, there is no end to the war in sight. We are now heading into the fourth month of a brutal invasion and assault on Ukraine, its sovereignty and its people. I again express solidarity with the ambassador, with Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze and with the entirety of the Ukrainian people. A lot has been covered in terms of EU accession. Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze highlighted the issue of sceptical countries. I believe we all know which countries they are. Perhaps, we should name them. They include Germany and France. Perhaps Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze would like to put others on the record here. What engagement,

if any, has been under way with those sceptical countries to make them see right and to allow this process to move on?

The other day, President Zelenskyy said that, at this point, diplomacy is the only way to bring the war to an end. What moves are now taking place? The Russians have said that the peace talks are now at a dead end. There was a very unhelpful and disgraceful intervention by the disgraced war criminal, Henry Kissinger, yesterday or the day before. He stated that Ukraine must cede territory to bring the war to an end. I would like to get a view on that. It is an absolutely disgraceful comment for anyone to make but I am not surprised to hear it coming from someone like Henry Kissinger.

Ireland's support for the investigation at the ICC was touched on. I note that the Prosecutor General of Ukraine has now opened more than 13,000 investigations into war crimes. We saw the first prosecution the other day, which is to be welcomed, but is there capacity to deal with that volume of investigations? People absolutely need to be held to account, as does the Russian Federation, but is there capacity to deal with that volume of investigations? What assistance is Ukraine getting in that respect and what additional assistance is required?

On the issue of food security, I will not labour my point because many people have spoken about it already. I was in New York last week. I attended the UN Security Council debate on food security. I heard at first hand of the impact that is being felt, the concerns and the fears that Russia is now using food insecurity as a threat against the world. At the same time, we see convoys of Russian trucks leaving Ukraine loaded with grain and headed for Russia. We have been told that it may take direct negotiations with Russia to end the blockade on the seaports to ensure that grain can flow freely to sub-Saharan countries, other African countries and other countries that are 100% dependent on this grain. What conversations, if any, are taking place? Is there scope for conversations or discussions of that nature?

I have a couple of other points. I was part of the delegation from this committee that went to Romania and Moldova. I have seen first-hand the generosity and warmth shown to Ukrainian refugees fleeing over the border. There was a major concern in Moldova about the situation, including in Transnistria. Overnight, we saw the former Moldovan president being arrested on high treason and corruption charges, which I am sure will add to the instability in Moldova. There is a real concern there about the Russian objective to move farther west, to Odesa, to block access to the Black Sea. We have seen the continuous missile attacks on Odesa. There was concern that if there was a full frontal assault on Odesa, up to 100,000 refugees would flee the border at Palanca. What discussions are taking place? Hopefully it never comes to the point that there is a full frontal assault on Odesa. What discussions have taken place with border control in Moldova to ensure that some issues experienced there are addressed?

On the broader issue of refugees, I note that 345,000 refugees in Poland have gone back over the border into Ukraine. We now see more refugees returning to Ukraine than are leaving. It is good to see Ukrainians heading home. Obviously, it is different in the east of Ukraine, where Russia's primary focus is at this point. Ukraine had bravely defended Kyiv and Kharkiv and Ukrainians obviously feel that it is now a little safer to return home. What capacity is there in Ukraine to deal with returning refugees?

Many countries have moved to reopen their embassies in Kyiv, including the USA, Denmark, Switzerland and the UK. I have asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Coveney, repeatedly, to look at reopening our embassy in Kyiv as a mark of solidarity and support. He said the Department is constantly evaluating the security situation. There is a concern about

Irish diplomatic staff and no one would want to put them in a dangerous situation but other countries have moved to reopen their embassies. How important do the ambassador and chair think it is for countries like Ireland to reopen their embassies as a show of solidarity and goodwill at this difficult time? I thank the Chair, the speaker and the ambassador.

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: There were quite a lot of questions. I will start from the very last one. Ukrainian people are watching attentively. It is welcome when embassies in Ukraine are reopened. The assessment by Irish security, intelligence and partners would be important for Irish diplomatic staff, but maybe that could be assessed and then decided on in co-ordination with other nations. We have been happy to see Americans, Canadians, the EU mission and many other missions reopen in Ukraine, even though they are understaffed and working in a limited capacity. That means a lot. None of them have brought back consular departments but they are focusing their activities on political and defence personnel.

Regarding how we are dealing with refugees, I stayed in Kyiv. Many of my friends left. Some went abroad and some went to the western part of Ukraine. I see many people coming back now. On a personal level, I understand that being there is still insecure. There are a number of reasons for it. For example, people do not have resources to pay additional rent in other parts of Ukraine. They still have their homes, so they do not need to stay in the facilities, which provide a safe place for internally displaced people from other regions of Ukraine. That means that many places in the western parts of Ukraine are being vacated but not for long, because unfortunately new people are coming in from internally. We have used schools and public municipal buildings for these centres to help internally displaced people to stay. Many are staying in other Ukrainians' homes. I cannot say that we are expanding the capacity for internally displaced people or helping them on the territory of Ukraine, but the number is not decreasing at all. Almost 9 million people are internally displaced and they are staying with family, friends or total strangers, or in public buildings prepared by local authorities to welcome internally displaced people.

I do not think direct negotiations on grain between Russia and Ukraine are possible. We would not engage in direct communication because that would be totally wrong, as it would be used by Russia as more leverage on us. That is why we believe this is the responsibility of many international organisations and nations. There is no direct negotiation between Russia and Ukraine on that issue.

The Deputy is right that our capacity to deal with investigations is far from being enough. That is why we have asked different countries that are able to send forensic experts and special prosecutors to Ukraine to help us to deal with this need to document and do it in accordance with the standards that will be needed for the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice. If Ireland is able to provide any additional capacity in that respect, the office of the prosecutor general would welcome those efforts. A serious team from France and from some other countries has worked with us but it will not be enough. More atrocities and additional crimes are being revealed in newly liberated territories. We hear terrible stories from near Kharkiv from people who have gone through that occupation. These are people we would know, not some stranger or an official. It is hard to imagine what was happening in these territories. One would think we had seen it all after Bucha but that is far from the truth.

With regard to the statement by Kissinger, I am very grateful to the Deputy for putting so eloquently that Kissinger made a disgraceful comment. I am happy that here and across the meetings we are having both online and offline with our counterparts, there are few who would dare to put it that way but there are some. Also, there are some countries that may not express

this directly but are hinting, under the pretext of saving the lives of Ukrainians, that Ukraine should make some concessions and basically agree to the loss of some of the territories. These countries do not understand that these are exactly the concessions that were made before and that in 2014, Ukraine listened to its partners. We were weak at the point - our chain of command was ruined after the former president of the Caucasus fled the country and so on - and it was extremely difficult. We were asked by our partners not to shoot back, resist or fight back. That was a huge mistake. Let us be clear. We have not been protected by the fig leaf of the Budapest memorandum, a sheet of paper that did not provide assurances, not to mention guarantees after we had given up the third biggest arsenal of nuclear weapons in the world. Therefore, we have learned our lesson from those suggestions in 2014 and we are not going to make the same mistake on our side again.

President Zelenskyy addressed the whole forum here in Davos online and this morning he spoke on the broadcast of the Ukrainian breakfast at Davos. He made pretty clear that Ukrainians do not agree to concessions but we definitely understand that at some point there will be discussions on a peace agreement and that wars are finished by peace talks. However, he said he would prefer Ukraine, on one side, with international partners that have been critical in helping us to go through this dire challenge, if one can call the war just a challenge, and, on the other side, some representative of Russia who can take a decision. I do not think we are considering on any level at this particular moment any real negotiations that would envisage anything but an exchange of prisoners of war and hostages and the establishment of humanitarian corridors between the occupied and non-occupied territories, while there is a ceasefire and a potential withdrawal of Russian troops. These are the only logical topics for talks to take place at this moment. We are not talking about the possibility of Ukraine giving up any part of our land.

Let us suggest, for example, that France gives Nice to Russia or that Germany gives Bavaria to Russia. That would be totally wrong. People must understand that concessions only indulge an additional appetite for Putin, the Russian regime and the Russian Federation. That will be seen and used as a weakness, which will lead to additional attacks and additional destruction in the future. That is why it is a no-go for us. As Golda Meir, the former President of Israel, once said, there is little room for compromise between those who have come to kill you and your desire to live and survive. That is where we are right now. We understand that the situation is existential for us.

With regard to naming the countries that are still sceptical, the Deputy is right that it is about our EU candidacy status. They are France, Germany, the Netherlands unfortunately, Belgium, and Austria to some extent, and Cyprus. We are looking around and trying to understand in which direction to go or lean. There are quite a few countries with which to work and that is why the parliamentary connections of members of the committee are very important in that regard.

I do not know if any members are involved in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. That is another assembly that will take place. Perhaps members could work with delegations of other countries directly or offline. That would also be helpful at this point. I apologise. Members can disregard that statement. However, notwithstanding that Ireland is not a member of NATO, it is represented on other parliamentary assemblies. Ukraine participates in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, although we are not a member.

Chairman: There is a lot of background noise. I ask Mr. Barry Andrews to allow Senator Chambers to comment as she is under time pressure? I presume both of them have asked their colleagues to facilitate them in contributing to the debate.

Senator Lisa Chambers: I appreciate that. I have to be in the Seanad Chamber by 11.30 a.m.

I thank the ambassador and Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze for their attendance. My first question is on the response of the Irish Government and Irish people in dealing with the new Ukrainian members of our communities who have arrived on our shores. What feedback has the delegation received from refugees who have come here about that response? Is there anything that we could do better or do more off? Is there anything that is making it difficult for people to settle here and integrate?

Are the witnesses satisfied with how the Irish Red Cross is operating? Do they have any suggestions regarding changes to how the Irish Red Cross is working in terms of the distribution of donations in Ireland? Do they have any advice that they we could convey to the Irish Red Cross?

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Ireland has been exemplary in welcoming Ukrainians and that even though Ireland has housing issues and shortages, it has been doing an incredible job. I cannot think of anything additional that can be provided to our citizens. The only thing that I would pay attention to is education, and I believe that should come from the Ukrainian ministry of education. We appreciate the possibility for children to attend school here but we must all ensure, maybe at EU level and then international level, that Ukrainian children while they remain abroad receive lessons on Ukrainian history and in their own language. Maybe they could be provided online from the schools in Ukraine. Additionally, among the Ukrainian refugees in countries that have accepted a high number, there may be teachers who could teach the lessons. Maybe that could be arranged on the spot. One of the issues we face right now is discussing how to approach this systemically and as soon as possible if the conflict is to go on. This is to ensure the children do not lose the understanding of who they are while they are away and waiting for the possibility to go home.

I do not know much about the operations in Ukraine of the Irish Red Cross specifically. Maybe the ambassador would be better equipped to address this issue. I will tell members about the International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC, an international organisation. We have been discouraged by its low efficiency and ability to open up the work on the ground in Ukraine, in addition to its unexpectedly low level of performance. I am not talking about the national Red Cross but the ICRC. Initially, UN agencies were basically not present on the ground in Ukraine. I thought it was totally disturbing in respect of any understanding of the efficiency of those institutions and considering all the money going to the region. In Moldova, where members' colleagues have been visiting, families receiving refugees are supposed to get compensation through UN agencies. Only 2,000 families have been dealt with. There are 95,000 refugees there. The organisations are claiming they do not have enough personnel or staff and so on but are sitting on huge loads of money that would have made a difference for those in need.

H.E. Ms Larysa Gerasko: Children who arrived in Ireland have full access to education, so there is no problem with that. We are working on establishing additional Saturday or Sunday Ukrainian schools here. We have two of them, in Cavan and Dublin, but we need more.

The one challenge is accommodation. Of course, members know about that. Unfortunately, our displaced people have to move to other places. For instance, Ukrainians may be in a hotel in a town, city or village for a month and are then moved by the authorities to another place, and then to yet another. It is a little difficult for children if they are going to one school and

then have to change to another, and then another. The same applies to adults. Most Ukrainians have found and started work, but, if they have to move, they have to find another job. That is a little bit of a problem.

With regard to the Irish Red Cross, I had a meeting with its secretary general. He told me most of the donations will be spent here for displaced Ukrainian people and that there is a fund, or something like that, that will be transferred to Ukraine for rebuilding the country after the war. We are in contact, but, since the Red Cross is an independent organisation, the embassy does not control its activity.

Deputy Brendan Howlin took the Chair.

Mr. Barry Andrews: It is great to be here and re-establish the practice of MEPs attending this committee. It is very useful for me and I hope we can share ideas.

I have two questions, one of which is on accession, which was touched on earlier. There is a debate in the European institutions about moving away from a technocratic approach to accession, which is based on full compliance with the Copenhagen criteria, to a more political approach, which would allow for the fact that some of the accession candidates do not necessarily meet all the compliance criteria. The EU of 2022 is very different from what it was when we joined 50 years ago, when it was known as the European Economic Community. Ireland was very poor then and not quite as socially progressive as it is now. There was a heightened state of tension over conflict on the island of Ireland in 1972, when we joined. Despite this, we blossomed. Ireland is a poster boy for accession and has demonstrated that convergence can happen within the EU. A debate on moving away from the technocratic approach is occurring in the EU institutions. My question is for Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze, in particular. If the European Council does not grant accession-candidate status to Ukraine at its June meeting, what will be the reaction politically and among the people in Ukraine, particularly if the sixth sanctions package has still not passed, which is quite likely? The US introduced an oil embargo on 8 March but we still have not done anything. We have been talking about it for three months. If we do not grant accession status and do not manage to deliver the sixth sanctions package, I believe there will be a negative reaction. Perhaps Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze could go into that in a little more detail.

My second question is on the humanitarian response. Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze mentioned the unexpectedly low level of performance of the ICRC and stated UN agencies are not present. That is very worrying because the Irish Red Cross has attracted donations of €35 million, which is unprecedented. It is really important that it deliver this time. However, it must comply with the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality. There is a very clear mandate. I have heard from many Ukrainian MPs who are frustrated by the ICRC because it has had meetings with Mr. Sergey Lavrov. It has opened an office in Rostov, Russia, but quite rightly states it has to do this to have the authority and credibility to do prisoner exchanges, open humanitarian corridors and visit Ukrainian prisoners in Russian territory. Maybe Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze could elaborate on the current attitude to the ICRC and whether there is an understanding of its mandate. Is the frustration really about its failure to deliver in terms of programming given the massive donations made by the public in Ireland and the rest of Europe over the past couple of months?

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: It would be extremely difficult to mitigate the negative effect of Ukraine not receiving candidate status if such a decision is made in June. It is about a ray of hope for the Ukrainian people. It is also part of the understanding that when we get to

the point where the real peace negotiations take place with Russia, we will be not only by our desire psychologically but also with some kind of promise of ability for us to get to the union we will be embedded in the EU. We might think of whether the Ukrainian authorities have been right in raising expectations internally at home, at least insisting on this publicly and so on. We do not see that happening for sure.

It is not only a political decision. Yes, we are talking about a political decision, but we have also delivered responses to the questionnaires provided from the European Commission. Hopefully, the Commission will be ready with its assessment of those answers soon. I hope that the basics of the Copenhagen criteria will be met by Ukraine in many areas. We are not talking exclusively because we are fighting the war and dying for our European choice but this is also based on the fact that Ukraine has delivered upon a lot of things already. The combination of these two things is drastically important to take this perhaps brave step that would envisage the possibility of further engagement for the EU.

Regarding the ICRC and UN agencies, I said that for the first month and a half after invasion, UN agencies were almost not present there. Now they are, but the scope of their presence and the scope of their performance from my perspective is not corresponding to the level of financing they are receiving and to the level of trust that many in society are putting in them by donating their money specifically to the UN agencies as well. I understand that the ICRC needs to be impartial and neutral. It needs to have the open corridors for conversation and dialogue with both sides to any conflict anywhere. However, so far we also need to understand that its opening an office in Rostov did not really lead to its ability to visit prisoners of war in Russian territory.

It has been the case throughout the war - for eight years already - that we have always granted access to those who have been legally detained on our territory who have come to kill us, but the ICRC never really had access to people detained in the occupied territories in eastern Ukraine or Crimea or on the territory of the Russian Federation. That is why there is so much dissatisfaction that the organisation is doing so much by working with Russian authorities but we do not see the protection and even the basic rights of prisoners of war being protected by the ICRC on Russian territory.

Vice Chairman: I understand that Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze is under time pressure. I do not know if she can stay with us for a few more minutes. If not, I know the ambassador will answer further questions. She might indicate if she needs to go. Hopefully she can stay with us for five minutes.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I thank Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze for giving her time this morning. Regarding accession, what are the Ukrainian Government's plans to address the objections of other member states between now and June? The Taoiseach is also in Davos and he has reiterated this morning Irish support for Ukraine's candidate status. I am concerned that some of the sanctions and the corporate reaction are virtue signalling based on the corporate profile of organisations. What is Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze's message to the corporate giants gathered in Davos about their response to date? What does she expect from them in future?

Deputy Seán Haughey: I thank Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze for her comprehensive report on all the issues involved. All the questions bar one have been asked. She said that some negotiations are taking place on the exchange of prisoners and humanitarian corridors and that there is no question of Ukraine ceding territory. How important is it to have an independent foreign policy arising from these negotiations in due course whenever they take place? Obviously,

Ukraine has our full support in its application to join the EU. Is there any question of Ukraine considering being militarily neutral or is NATO membership very important for Ukraine?

Vice Chairman: I will give the floor to Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze for the final time to answer those questions and to make her final remarks to the committee. I again thank her for her time.

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: I am grateful that even on this stage the Prime Minister of Ireland has yet again voiced his support for Ukraine, which is very important for us. It is important that representatives of different friendly countries are also doing an advocacy job for Ukraine. Regarding the message right now, the decision of the government was that a few ministers, including the Deputy Prime Minister who has responsibility for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration would now travel to certain sceptical countries to argue our case. We, as MPs, are also working through the friendship groups like the European integration committee engaging with the people from the foreign affairs committee to mobilise all the resources. We are also co-ordinating our efforts with non-governmental organisations that are also actively connecting. Obviously, the president is also involved in this endeavour. We hope that this multilayer approach will give the result by the end of June.

I see how much difficulty there has been on agreeing the sixth package of sanctions. I reiterate that we need to be serious about our values and our principles if we really mean all those words that have been repeated so many times. I was in the NGO sector before getting involved in politics following the revolution of dignity in 2014. I was brought up on those values that we believe in. On behalf of all those who taught us those values, some doing it from textbooks, we would like to really stand up for them and be ready to pay the price for them as well. That type of discussion needs to happen sometimes openly but sometimes behind closed doors in the EU.

One of my main messages to the corporate giants is about responsibility and some honest solidarity towards Ukrainian companies but also about responsibility in not having the blood of Ukrainians on the profits they are getting. Short-term losses in the Russian Federation could be a result of this responsibility and the value-based business strategies. It could bring about bigger and better results in the mid- to long-term future. Some are engaged in social responsibility. Unfortunately, some are performing very strange policies of really protecting lives for about two years by withdrawing from the Russian Federation but paying one year or two years' salary to their former employees in the Russian Federation. Maybe they could match that pledge with some assistance going to Ukraine. It is case-by-case. There are a lot of corporations here which understand a value-based approach very well. They are leading by example and engaging others and are advocating with other companies in order to get out of the Russian Federation.

I thank the member for the question with regard to independent foreign policy. I am one of those people who believes that neutrality for Ukraine, if it is accepted today, would mean slavery for us tomorrow. It would confirm that Russia would have us under its sphere of influence and that we would be coming back to the great power struggle which led to the First World War and the Second World War. In 2014, according to our constitution, our laws and our legal system, we were a non-aligned and a non-bloc country. That did not preclude the Russian Federation, which was a guarantor of our security, from grabbing part of our territory by illegal annexation and from starting the war in the east of Ukraine. Therefore, once we win this war and once we restore our territory's integrity, the first step should be Ukraine being admitted to NATO. Ukraine will be a huge asset to NATO and we will also benefit from being with other like-minded countries. That common strength will be another deterrent to Russia from attacking further.

I would like to close by once again thanking the committee for such a thorough engagement in all the matters that are so important right now for Ukraine. I would like to thank Ireland and the Irish people, Parliament, politicians and Government for everything they are doing for Ukraine. I would encourage them not to get fatigued or tired. As value-based societies, we do not have the right to be tired of this war until we bring it to common victory. It has to be our common cause to achieve victory over the evil that has arisen again in the 21st century.

Vice Chairman: Thank you very much, Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze. We are most grateful for your time. We wish you every success in your further discussions at the World Economic Forum in Davos. One of my colleagues wants to put another question and maybe the ambassador would take that. We again thank Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze.

Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Thank you so much.

Deputy McHugh resumed the Chair.

Chairman: Thank you very much, Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze. We wish you good luck and we will be in touch.

Senator Vincent P. Martin: That was a very fruitful, productive session. One of the many benefits Ukraine will realise when it hopefully takes its place in the EU eventually is how we feed in. We had an Irish MEP here. He was elected by Ireland and he comes to our national Parliament. There is joined-up thinking. It was good to see Mr. Barry Andrews, MEP, contribute earlier.

I would like to thank the ambassador for finding the time in a very busy schedule to visit Barretstown in County Kildare recently. We had a large attendance there. It was a place for volunteers on the front line to meet each other and to learn what is and what is not going well, but also a place for displaced Ukrainians fleeing the war to meet each other. The event in Barretstown was a very successful. Barretstown itself is open to all children, including children from Ukraine with serious illnesses. It has really stepped up.

I received a number of representations on the day from the ambassador's proud country people. Two of them took me by surprise. I did not have to respond in writing but there was a bit of an impromptu clinic in Barretstown. Two Ukrainian citizens asked me how they could thank Ireland for doing what it is doing. They said they would really like to get that appreciation across. It was a very touching moment. Ireland, of course, has had its dark periods in the past, including the Great Famine. It is the very least we can do in this awful, horrendous situation.

Most questions have been asked but I had another representation on that and I wonder whether it is materialising yet. I am aware of at least two displaced Ukrainians in County Kildare who are so grateful for the welcome they got. They will forever remember Ireland but despite the warmth of the welcome, they have decided to go home to the western part of their country because they are absolutely heartbroken being wrenched from their homeland. Is that happening yet? Does the ambassador have any information on traffic going back? I emphasise that these people love Ireland but they have made plans to return to the western part of Ukraine. Were they isolated incidents or is happening more generally?

Chairman: Could the ambassador reply to Senator Martin and wrap up? I think all the questions have been asked, so she can wrap up.

H.E. Ms Larysa Gerasko: To date, as far as I know, around 1 million Ukrainians have

returned to Ukraine. The number of people who are returning to Ukraine exceeds the number who are leaving. It is equal now. I would say the number of people who are fleeing the country now is very low. As can be seen, the number of new arrivals to Ireland has decreased and has plateaued. Of course, we hope that as the situation gets better in Ukraine, more people will return.

I thank the Chair for inviting me and our chair, Ms Klympush-Tsintsadze. I hope she answered all the questions. She has been dealing with EU integration for many years because she was deputy prime minister on European integration before. If members have any other questions, I am ready to answer them.

Chairman: It was a pleasure to have both yourself, ambassador, and Ms Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, the chair of the Ukrainian committee on EU affairs, with us today. It was a pleasure having the ambassador and the chair of the EU committee here today. ehensive presentations and responses. This committee will continue to work with and be with Ukrainians. We have been to Romania and Moldova. We visited the border towns of Siret and Palanca and in a couple of weeks' time we plan to go to Georgia. No doubt the officials and the clerk will be in touch with the ambassador's office and I know she will point us in the right direction if needed.

We are with Ukraine, not just in words but also in actions. We will continue to vociferously support Ukraine's EU accession request along with that of Moldova and Georgia.

We wish our guests well. A lot of their fellow citizens are in various towns, counties and regions of Ireland and while we are not getting everything right because of the magnitude of the challenge, we are very focused on doing our very best for Ukrainian men, women and children. We wish everyone well.

H.E. Ms Larysa Gerasko: Thank you so much. We are really grateful to the Government, the Parliament and the Oireachtas for their great support of Ukraine and our people. We are especially grateful for Ireland's support for Ukraine's EU candidacy and its work to convince the so-called sceptical countries, most of which have been named. In response to the question on what our position would be if candidacy status is not granted in June, it is hard to imagine this because Ukraine and the Ukrainian people deserve the right to be a part of the European family.

Chairman: Go raibh maith agat.

The joint committee adjourned at 11.53 a.m. *sine die*.