Beat: News

Statement by President von der Leyen

European Commission

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USPA NEWS - Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with Estonian Prime Minister Kallas and NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg

Prime Minister,

Secretary-General, dear Jens,

Dear Kaja,

thank you very much for hosting us in Tallinn on such a special day. Indeed, the day when, 105 years ago, Estonia declared its independence. Estonia's determination to remain a free and independent country has been put to the test, time and again. But independence was finally restored on the 20 August 1991. I also want to share a quote from a famous Estonian, the former President Lennart Meri who said: 'Europe is not geography. Europe is a unity of principles and an allegiance to principles. Principles shape geography – geography does not shape principles.' This is a truth that Putin has never understood.

One year on, from the start of his brutal war, Putin has failed to achieve a single one of his strategic goals. Instead of dividing the European Union, he finds us united and determined to stand by Ukraine for as long as it takes. Instead of dominating the global energy market, he has seen his main source of revenue slashed. Instead of wiping Ukraine off the map, he is confronted with a nation more vigorous than ever. Ukraine has become a testament to the bravery of a nation which will never relent in its quest for freedom. We have seen that in every single day of the 365 days since the beginning of this atrocious war. And just as Estonia stands proudly as a free and independent state, Ukraine will prevail. Ukraine will prevail because Ukrainians will neither flinch nor step back. And Ukraine will prevail because Europe and its partners and allies will stand firm.

But one year on, the fight rages on. And Putin has upped the stakes. He is sending hundreds of thousands of young Russians as cannon fodder in the trenches in Ukraine. What we saw and heard earlier this week from Moscow tells us that as the losses mount on the battlefield, so does the desperation, the delusion, and the disinformation. That shows the strain Putin's regime is under. But it also comes with real and renewed danger for Ukraine. So now is the time to double down. We must keep giving Ukraine the means to defend itself, until the Russians end this war and leave Ukraine.

This is why we stand firmly by Ukraine, as determined as ever to support Ukraine financially, economically and militarily, to increase our own defence capabilities, and to increase the pressure on Russia and hold it accountable. Russia is increasingly isolated. I think the vote yesterday at the United Nations General Assembly was very telling – 141 countries voted in favour of the resolution condemning Russia. Russia is falling backwards towards an autarchic economy, cut away from the world. Our sanctions are eroding sharply its economic base, slashing any prospect to modernise it. We will continue to put pressure on Russia and on those supporting it on the battlefield. We will continue going after Putin's cronies. And we will go after those helping Russia to circumvent sanctions or replenish its war arsenal.

At the same time, we work to ensure Ukraine's economic and military resilience. First, with continued financial support. We mobilised so far EUR 67 billion. Second, with increased military support. We aim to train 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers in the European Union. Our Member States are delivering military equipment. And we will turn to joint procurement to deliver urgent military supplies for Ukraine, such as 155-millimetre ammunition. Equally important is to work with our defence industry to ramp up the production of this ammunition and other equipment needed by Ukrainian forces, but also to replenish our own stocks. Dear Kaja, you rightly brought attention to this at the last European Council. And we are taking action.

Finally, this is not just about winning on the battlefield. Ukrainians are fighting for their right to choose their own future. And they have already chosen. They have chosen the European Union. They have chosen the unity of principles – as President Lennart Meri said. The Ukrainian soldiers fighting in the trenches of Bakhmut are defending this unity of principles. And in these dark times, the hearts of

Ukrainian people are warmed by the confidence that Ukraine will join the European Union one day. This is how principles shape geography.

Dear Kaja,

Today, I am proud to stand here together with you and you, Jens, in Tallinn celebrating Estonia's freedom and independence. And I am proud that we stand here together in support of the Ukrainian people and their fight for freedom and independence. I am certain that, like the people of Estonia, Ukraine too will prevail.

Thank you.

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