

Dear Mr Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada,

Dear Members of the Verkhovna Rada,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This morning I visited Irpin' and Borodyanka and saw the destruction caused by the Russian army. Only one question came to mind. What right does anyone have to harm you this way? By what right? There is no rational answer to this question.

If everything had gone according to Vladimir Putin's plan, today your country would be under the administration of an occupation army, and a puppet government controlled by the Kremlin would govern from Kyiv. But Vladimir Putin's plan has failed.

Instead, I am addressing you, the representatives of the Ukrainian people, who have been elected in free and democratic elections. I am speaking to the great nation of a great country.

The ruins which I saw in the suburbs of your capital are the tragic souvenirs of Putin's fantasy. A fantasy about a world which exists only in the minds of those who do not believe in an individual's freedom. Of those who do not believe in the right of nations to choose their own direction and their own destiny. A fantasy that is dangerous not only for Ukraine, but for the entire democratic world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The reality is clear. Russia has been waging war against Ukraine for a long time. The conflict did not start by the barbarian missile attacks in that gloomy February morning in 2022. It has started long before that, by the massive propaganda denying your statehood, your national and cultural identity, your language. The dehumanization of Ukrainians started long before Russian soldiers committed war crimes in Bucha and Mariupol. Long before the little green men and "ichtamny" invaded Crimea and Donbas in 2014.

But the reality also is that in those eight years we in the West did not do enough to stop Moscow. Many thought that Crimea would be enough for the Kremlin, that Russia would be satisfied with parts of Donbas. Slovaks are very familiar with such scenario. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, Adolf Hitler sent a message to the world that a free and democratic

Czechoslovakia was not part of his plan for a new Europe. He aggressively took over our territory while our allies in the West closed their eyes. They thought that by signing the Munich Agreement they had sown peace; but they harvested shame. They had not prevented the war, which destroyed millions of lives including in my and your country.

Since the 24th of February it is obvious that Putin is not interested in a piece of Donbas or Crimea. He wants to destroy Ukraine because you are different. You have built an open society and economy. You have strengthened the rule of law and have fought corruption. And your way of life was a clear evidence that you no longer want to have anything to do with *homo sovieticus*. After all, as one of Putin's own propagandists stated, "you are anti-Russia".

Dear Ukrainians,

Today you are defending your country, your lives, your future and your right to decide autonomously about your future. You are defending the rights and rules which have guaranteed decades of peace on our continent. The rules, which the Russian Federation has flagrantly trampled on. By doing so, you are also defending us and we thank you for that. Your war is a just and defensive one. The entire democratic world stands by your side. Not only in words, which you have been hearing for too long. Now it is time for action.

As your neighbour, we feel the direct consequences of the Russian aggression against you. We have not closed our eyes. We are among the countries, which have provided the most assistance on a per capita basis. We cannot take up arms to fight by your side, but I want to tell you what we can do and what we are doing.

First, we will take care of those of you who had to flee the war, of your women and children. For as long as they need it. I am proud of the powerful wave of solidarity shown by my compatriots. In the first days of the full-scale invasion, I welcomed your citizens at our border and I saw the consequences of the hell that Putin has unleashed on you. I saw fear and pain, but also a great resolve in the eyes of those to whom we gave safe refuge. I want to assure you that fear is disappearing, that we are helping to soothe the pain and that the resolve continues. Your close ones, wives, mothers, grandmothers and children are thinking about you and are praying for you. They believe that they will soon be able to return to a free country.

Second, we know that packages of medicines and food supplies alone will not expel the occupants from your country. Your defenders need military supplies

and equipment. This is why we have helped and will continue helping in this regard too. Recently it was the S-300 missile system, demining systems and ammunition, soon it will be Zuzana howitzers. And in conversations with our partners and allies, we are clear that what Ukraine needs is not only humanitarian aid but also military assistance.

Third – we will not keep our mouth shut. We will not be quiet when Russia commits war crimes in plain sight. Today I saw what Russian invaders left behind in the Kyiv suburbs. Already a month ago, Slovak forensic experts and police technicians began helping your prosecutors and experts. I know that documenting Russian crimes in Ukraine will not return your family and friends. But it will give you the opportunity to tell the whole world what had happened. And to prosecute those who caused it.

Fourth – we will help you with the export of grain and other goods which Putin's regime has cynically confiscated or blocked in Ukrainian ports. He hopes to break you economically even more, and that the threat of a global food shortage will weaken the resolve of the free world to sanction Russian aggression. But in fact, he has achieved the opposite – today the whole world can see who is the aggressor and who has been attacked. Our resolve has not weakened, on the contrary.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many of our mothers and fathers still remember the invasion of the Soviet army of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Tanks were sent in to interrupt our efforts to humanize and democratize a totalitarian regime. Back then, the entire civilized world condemned the invasion and demonstrations took place in many big cities. But the world did very little to change something... Demonstrations took place even on the Red Square in Moscow, where the "brave eight" protested against the occupation, with the words "for your freedom and our freedom". Today we are not only standing up for your freedom on squares of our cities; we are also helping and we will continue to do so. So the same mistake, which was made in 1968 is not made again.

We are with you and you are close to us. Over one hundred years ago, at the beginning of the First World War, the first Czech Legion, later joined by the Slovaks, had their swearing-in ceremony not far from here, at Sofiiska Square. They were accommodated at St. Michael's Monastery and they trained at St. Vladimir's Hill. Your capital was the base for our Czechoslovak resistance, although at the time, the great powers did not take it seriously. And do you know what happened? Under excellent command, that small legion grew into

an army of legionaries. From 1918 to 1919 they took over the entire Trans-Siberian Railway, keeping in check the Soviet Russia in check and earning an international respect for it. Today your defenders and all of you have our utmost respect.

Dear Ukrainians,

I believe that your country will win this war and Russia will be held accountable for its enormous mistakes. Those calling for stopping military assistance to Ukraine are calling for your capitulation. Those who think that a ceasefire is possible without the withdrawal of the Russian soldiers has not learned the lessons of 1938, 1968 or 2014. And to those calling for the need to allow Vladimir Putin to save face, I recommend they read one of his biographies. The title of the book is *The Man without a Face*.

Dear Members of the Parliament,

Long debates about whether Ukraine should receive the status of a candidate for accession to the European Union are underway. To us and to you, the answer is absolutely clear. Ukraine belongs to the European Union and will be a part of it. Slovakia and I personally will do everything to ensure that it happens as soon as possible; I will continue to talk about it with other leaders. We will also help with your reconstruction. Once this nightmare is over, Ukraine will blossom again. Just as today flowers are already growing in the ruined houses in Borodyanka and Bucha.

We should never negotiate out of fear, but we should never fear to negotiate. We all want peace, and you, Ukrainian men and women want it the most. Slovakia will support all of your efforts aimed at peaceful resolution of the conflict that Russia has unleashed. But only under terms determined by you, the Ukrainian people, who have been attacked and are heroically defending itself.

We will continue to support you so that your position in these negotiations is even stronger. As your famous poet Taras Shevchenko said: “*Boritesya-poborete! Vam Boh pomahae! Za vas pravda, za vas slava, i voľa sviataja*”. [*read in Ukrainian: "Struggle on—and be triumphant! God Himself will aid you; At your side fight truth and glory, Right and holy freedom"*].

Ščyro Ďjakuju [*read in Ukrainian: Thank you so much*].