



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Our hearts also go out to the victims of the tragic train accident in Greece.

Last Friday, we came together to mark one year since the launch of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The vast majority of participating States in this Council condemned the Kremlin for the death, destruction and suffering it has caused in Ukraine. At the same time, protesters around the world gathered to demonstrate their opposition to this brutal war. They were joined in this effort by a number of brave Russian citizens *within* Russia. These courageous individuals spoke the truth to a brutally oppressive regime that they knew would severely punish them for daring to challenge its lies and propaganda.

As much as Putin and his entourage would like to muffle every critic and silence all dissent, they cannot.

Colleagues, today I would like to amplify one of the voices in Russia that is vehemently opposed to Putin's war. I will now read to you from a letter dated February 15 from a man I am honored to call a friend, and a true patriot of Russia, Vladimir Kara-Murza, who is being held in Pretrial Detention Centre No. 5 in Moscow right now. I quote:

To the OSCE Permanent Council:

Mr. Chair, Your Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen.

It is nearly a year since Vladimir Putin launched his criminal, unprovoked and aggressive war against Ukraine. It was a year that brought carnage, grief, and loss of life on a scale not seen in Europe in decades. For millions of people in Ukraine, in Russia and across the world, 24th February will forever mark a dark date on the calendar.

Needless to say, Putin's aggression against Ukraine has violated all the basic principles on which the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is founded. And so has the other war the Kremlin conducted last year: its successful blitzkrieg on what remained of civil society and independent media in Russia. News outlets that brought Russian citizens the hard truth about what was happening – including Echo of Moscow, Novaya Gazeta and TV Rain –

have been shut down. In all, the Russian authorities blocked thousands of online sources, as well as major social media such as Twitter and Facebook, imposing a near-total information blackout on our population. Leading human rights organizations with decades of history behind them – including symbolically, the Moscow Helsinki Group founded in 1976 to monitor Kremlin's compliance with the Helsinki Final Act – fell victim to this war as well. New draconian laws swiftly passed in the first days of the invasion criminalized public opposition to the war – indeed, simply referring to it as a “war” – with prison terms up to 15 years. Anyone who strays from the official propaganda line is considered a “traitor” and a “criminal”. In short, since 24 February 2022 Vladimir Putin's regime brought Russia as close as humanly possible to the reality once described by George Orwell – a reality in which “war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength.”

Just as the goal of Putin's war on Ukraine was to subdue a proud and sovereign nation, the goal of his internal war was to impose a straitjacket of false unanimity on Russian society. The Kremlin claims that all Russians support its actions – and that all the horrors it is bringing on Ukraine are being brought on behalf of our whole country.

But it's not true. Because, despite the censorship, the repression and the very threat of imprisonment, thousands of Russians have openly denounced Putin's war on Ukraine. According to human rights groups, since February of last year more than 19,000 people were detained by police at anti-war protests across Russia. Nearly 6,000 have faced administrative charges. Dozens of us are now imprisoned for it – journalists, lawyers, artists, priests, politicians, military officers; people of different backgrounds and different vocations who have refused to stay silent in the face of this atrocity, even at the cost of personal freedom.

It is my hope that when the free world today thinks and speaks about Russia, it will remember not only the aggressors and war criminals in the Kremlin, but also those who are standing up to them. Because we are all Russians, too.

Today is a very dark time – for Ukraine, for Russia and for the whole of this organization. But Soviet dissidents liked to say that “night is darkest before the dawn” and history proved them right. Let us keep faith in a better tomorrow, a time when Russia can have a democratically elected government that will live in peace both with its own citizens and with its neighbors – and that will honor the Helsinki principles not on paper but in reality, as well. Despite everything, I firmly believe that day will come and I look forward to working together with all our friends across the OSCE to bring that closer.

Signed, Vladimir Kara-Murza.

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