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NATO Parliamentary Assembly labels Russia a ‘terrorist state’

By Calum Nelson

On 21 November the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (PA), which is institutionally separate from NATO, unanimously voted to adopt a resolution recognising Russia as a “terrorist state”. In its 68th Annual Session in Madrid, the PA also urged NATO allies to increase their military support to Ukraine and to aid the country’s integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. The Assembly is not a formal body of NATO but an independent union of the parliaments of the member states and associated nations.

Taking place from 18-21 November, the session saw all 269 parliamentarians from the 30 NATO member nations and about 100 members from partner countries and parliamentary bodies meet to assess how decisions made at the NATO Summit in June align with the Assembly’s earlier recommendations for NATO’s new Strategic Concept, broader adaptation and modernisation, standing with Ukraine and confronting Russia’s threat.

New leadership, same message

Newly-elected President of the NATO PA, Joëlle Garriaud-Maylam, [condemned](#) Putin’s war in Ukraine and praised the Ukrainian people for defending European values after she was appointed for a one-year renewable term. The French Senator, who succeeds outgoing PA President, US Congressman Gerald E. Connolly, had been a member of the Assembly for 14 years and Vice-President since her election in November 2020. She is also a member of the Committee for European

Affairs, the National Commission for the Elimination of Anti-Personnel Mines and Cluster Munitions, and Vice-President of the Delegation of Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities.

“[Russian leaders] are acting like real terrorists, showing unprecedented barbarism by attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure. We must act, and they must be judged as terrorists in front of international tribunals,” she told the Assembly on 21 November. “As NATO parliamentarians, we must support Ukraine, we must support its people. People who are everyday showing courage and resilience in the service of our values of Freedom, democracy and sovereignty”.

Garriaud-Maylam was joined by several senior officials on the final day of the session, including NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, President of the Senate Ander Gil and President of the Congress of Deputies Meritxell Batet. “We need to stay the course together on Ukraine,” Stoltenberg [told](#) legislators, stressing that “if we allow Putin to win, all of us will have to pay a much higher price. Authoritarian regimes around the world will learn that they can get what they want with brute force”.

Sanchez echoed Stoltenberg’s message, [stating](#) that NATO members “should launch an absolutely resounding message to Putin: respect the national sovereignty of Ukraine and its capacity to freely chose its future”. “Until this happens, we shall remain united, and we shall support Ukraine in its fight and

struggle for freedom [...] This Alliance has become stronger in the past few months in the face of Putin's barbarity," he continued.

Ukrainian defiance

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [addressed](#) the assembly in a video call from Kyiv, as he called for NATO members to take a hard stance against Russia and increase their support to the Ukrainian resistance. In a typical show of strength, Zelensky maintained that: "Ukrainians are sure we can defend ourselves in this war, we can reinstate our borders, European borders, along the full length of our southern and eastern flanks. The power of our democracy will be a guarantee that no tyranny to the east of us will be able to threaten Europe".

Zelensky also stressed the need for increased long-term unity between Ukraine and the rest of Europe as he reiterated his desire to see Ukraine become a member of the European Union and NATO. "Now, when we are defending European values on the battlefield in a full-scale war, it is absolutely clear how unfair and unnatural Ukraine's alienation from Europe has been," he said. "I urge you to do everything in your power so that our community of nations - nations of values - will never again be divided or weakened".

Resolutions passed

Shortly after Zelensky's speech, the Assembly adopted [resolutions 479](#) and [478](#) which contained several recommendations in support of Ukraine. NATO PA resolutions are not binding but lay out recommendations to NATO member states. Among the many recommendations in these two resolutions, the documents stress governments should: "increase military, intelligence, financial, training and humanitarian support to Ukraine, by accelerating deliveries of the weapons that Ukraine needs to protect itself and to restore its territorial integrity". They call on members to "state clearly that the Russian state under the current regime is a terrorist one", citing "despicable attacks deliberately targeting civilians and infrastructure that amount to acts of terror against the population and constitute

war crimes". The resolutions also advocate for the creation of "an international tribunal" that would prosecute Russian acts of aggression against Ukraine and urges member states to collaborate in making Russia pay full reparations to Ukraine, by establishing an "international compensation mechanism".

Yehor Chernev, who heads the Permanent Delegation of Ukraine to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, [welcomed](#) the resolutions, saying he was "very pleased with the fact that the Ukrainian position, such as the creation of a tribunal, the payment of reparations, or the recognition of Russia as a terrorist state, is gradually becoming mainstream at the highest international platforms". He added that delegates from each NATO member state agreed that "Ukraine's membership [of NATO] is desirable and important for the Alliance itself".

Growing consensus but American reluctance

The NATO PA resolutions are not the first time a major international organisation has recognised Russia as a terrorist state. On 13 October, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) passed a similar [motion](#), describing the current Russian Federation as a 'terrorist regime', having expelled the country from the Council of Europe in March following the invasion of Ukraine. And on the 23 November, the European Parliament followed suit, [voting](#) to recognise Russia as "state sponsor of terrorism". Several [national institutions](#) have also declared Russia a terrorist state, including the Senate of Poland and the Czech, Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian Parliaments, while international human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch have attested that the Russian military has committed "unspeakable" and "deliberate" war crimes in several parts of occupied Ukraine.

Despite rigorous debate on Capitol Hill, US President Joe Biden, has not, however designated Russia as a terrorist state. In September, the White House [stated](#) the President had chosen not to recognise Russia as a terrorist state, claiming such a move could have unintended consequences for US support

of Ukraine. President Zelensky [first asked](#) the US Congress and the White House to add Russia to the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism in April 2022, and while both the US House of Representatives and the Senate have passed resolutions calling on the Secretary of State Antony Blinken to add Russia to the list, he has so far refused to do so. Such a designation has serious implications: imposing restrictions on US foreign assistance, a ban on defence exports and sales, controls over items that can be used for both military and non-military purposes and a host of other economic sanctions, effectively rendering the target a pariah. The designation would also remove Russia's sovereign immunity before federal and state courts in the US and create economic repercussions for any country that continues to engage with Russia. Currently the State Department's list includes four countries: Syria, Iran, North Korea and Cuba.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre elaborated on the decision, claiming the designation would "undercut unprecedented multilateral conditions that have been so effective in holding Putin accountable and could also undermine our ability to support Ukraine at the negotiating table". The US and Russia engage across several international institutions and frameworks, for example, both hold permanent seats in the UN Security Council.

Other NATO PA resolutions

In addition to condemning Russia's invasion and taking measures to strengthen support to Ukraine, the NATO PA adopted further resolutions. Over the course of the session the Assembly debated and adopted [16 draft reports](#) aimed at keeping the alliance 'fit for purpose', implementing defence commitments made at the June 2022 NATO Summit, responding to the economic consequences of Russia's war, cyber-security, the impact of climate change and fighting corruption. The Assembly also appointed five Vice-Presidents: Zaida Cantera from Spain; Nicu Falcoi from Romania; Kevan Jones from the UK; Linda Sánchez from the United States and Michał Szczerba from Poland.

In his [final address](#), outgoing PA President, Congressman Connolly paid tribute to Ukrainians for fighting to uphold democracy and claimed Russia's war in Ukraine reaffirmed the need for NATO to establish a Centre for Democratic Resilience at the alliance's headquarters. The creation of the Centre, [first proposed](#) by Connolly in 2019 with the Assembly's backing, would serve as "a resource and a clearinghouse of best practices and cross-fertilisation on democratic benchmarks available to member, partner, and aspirant states, upon request".

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