



Charles Michel, Jens Stoltenberg and Ursula von der Leyen at NATO Headquarters on the evening of 24 February.

# UNITY, FIRMNESS AND SOLIDARITY

EU and NATO take unprecedented action against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including hosting refugees on European soil and activating the Alliance's Response Force

**“H**ISTORIC decisions in a historic situation”. With these words, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen perfectly sums up the unprecedented reaction of a Europe that is more united than ever in the face of Russia's barbarism. Just hours after Russian troops began their invasion of Ukraine in the early hours of 24 February, the EU and NATO formed a single, strong block to show their revulsion at the invasion of Ukraine and their unreserved

support for the Ukrainian people, international law and the security and stability of Europe. The response has been swift, unanimous, forceful and unrelenting: meetings of heads of state and government, ministers from different areas, and heads of European and Atlantic institutions with decision-making and implementation capacity have followed unfalteringly, one after another. In just a few days, historic measures have been put in place, including unprecedented sanctions against Russia —shortly thereafter extended to Belarus—,

the reinforcement of allied defensive and deterrent military deployment on the Alliance's eastern flank, the authorisation of arms funding for Ukraine through the European Peace Facility, and the implementation of humanitarian aid for refugees never before undertaken on European soil. In a clear demonstration of unity and strength of response, the leaders of the Atlantic Alliance, Jens Stoltenberg, the European Council, Charles Michel, and the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, met at NATO headquarters

## INTERNATIONAL

on 24 February, just hours after Russia's "brutal, unprovoked and sustained attack on Ukraine", and held a joint press conference. A dismayed but firm Stoltenberg —flanked by von der Leyen and Michel— said that "Russia is attempting to turn back the clock by force. To re-establish a sphere of influence. And to undermine the global rules that have kept Europe safe for decades. We have all made tireless efforts to engage Russia in diplomacy. But Moscow has refused dialogue, and chosen aggression. NATO and the EU stand with the brave people of Ukraine. We support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity [...] There must be no misunderstanding or miscalculation by Russia. NATO will do whatever it takes to protect and defend all Allies".

From New York, the United Nations, which is undoubtedly limited when it comes to issuing a resolution due to Russia's veto in the Security Council, also chose to show its absolute condemnation of the attack and its unwavering defence of international law on 24 February. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the Russian military offensive was incompatible with the principles of the UN Charter, indicating that his priority at that time was the protection of civilians: "We are committed to staying and delivering, to support people in Ukraine in their time of need". By 2 March the invasion of Ukraine had already generated one million refugees (the vast majority women and children) and UNHCR estimates put the number of people who will be forced to flee their homes in the coming weeks at over five million.

### EUROPEAN SECURITY

At the same time and in coordination with the rest of the international organisations (there have been several emergency meetings of the UN, NATO, the G7 and the Council of Europe with the common purpose of defending international law), the European Union activated a hectic agenda. And a resolute one at that. On 24 February, following an extraordinary in-person European Council meeting, the heads of state and government of the 27 made it very clear, unequivocally, that the Union would activate all mechanisms at its disposal for peace and security in Europe and help the people of Ukraine. To this end, they initiated several simultaneous and complementary

lines of action. They approved the largest package of sanctions against a country in the history of the EU —measures taken in several rounds and also implemented by countries such as the United States, Japan and even Switzerland— and decided to sanction the permission to land, take off or fly over their territories of any aircraft operated by Russian airlines and also those registered in Russia or belonging to a Russian natural or legal person.

Hours later, in two extraordinary virtual meetings, the foreign and defence ministers —the former on 27 February and the latter on 28 February— took an unprecedented decision and agreed to release 450 million euros from the EU

money will come from the European Peace Facility, a new instrument that was created last year. It has an overall budget of €5 billion for the period 2021-2027 and, until now, has been used primarily to fund training and capacity building missions deployed by the EU. Precisely in order to direct and coordinate the purchase of arms requested by the Ukrainian government of Volodymyr Zelensky, the EU created a specific unit in Brussels for this purpose. At almost the same time, the European Commission decided to mobilise the EU Satellite Centre (SatCen) in Madrid to provide intelligence services to Kyiv.

On 27 February, the European Commission took another historic decision



A mother and child flee on a refugee train from Lviv station in Ukraine to Poland on 1 March.

Bojza Sánchez Titillo/EEF

budget to fund the delivery of arms to Ukraine so that it can defend itself against Russia's attack. In addition, Brussels will allocate another 50 million euros for non-lethal equipment for the Ukrainian army, such as fuel, military helmets and bullet-proof vests. In total, 500 million euros in military assistance to Kyiv. Deliveries will be made through border countries, Poland in particular.

As the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, explained: "Putin's war is not only against Ukraine. We need to understand the gravity of the situation for Europeans and global security". The

at an emergency meeting in which it activated a previously unused directive allowing an unlimited number of people fleeing a disaster to enter European territory. The measure allows not only for the entry of thousands of Ukrainians, but also for them to stay in Europe for at least one year, and this period is renewable if necessary.

At the same time, and since the beginning of the war, the Union has deployed all its mechanisms to try to alleviate the suffering of the Ukrainian people. "Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the humanitarian needs are expected to be disastrous. Armed violence

is causing widespread human suffering, civilian casualties, damage to infrastructures and large-scale displacement”, Borrell said.

The EU has therefore been supporting displaced persons and coordinating the delivery of material assistance to Ukraine through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, with offers from more than 20 Member States (Spain among them), which include eight million essential medical care items and civil protection support.

In an emotional and symbolic gesture, the European Parliament also wished

### DEFENSIVE REINFORCEMENT

NATO’s agenda did not lag behind. In an emergency statement issued just hours after the invasion, the Atlantic Council announced that “NATO will continue to take all necessary measures to ensure the security and defence of all Allies”. In the same vein, the heads of state and government who met online on the afternoon of 25 February—a meeting to which Josep Borrell was invited, as were the representatives of Sweden and Finland—issued a clear statement: “We call on Russia

invoked when an ally feels threatened, the communiqué states: “we will continue to take all measures and decisions required to ensure the security and defence of all Allies. We have deployed defensive land and air forces in the eastern part of the Alliance and maritime assets across the NATO area. We have activated NATO’s defence plans to prepare ourselves to respond to a range of contingencies and to secure Alliance territory, including by drawing on our response forces. We are now making significant additional defensive deployments of forces to the eastern part of the Alliance. We will make all deployments necessary to ensure strong and credible deterrence and defence across the Alliance, now and in the future [...] Our commitment to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty is iron-clad. We stand united to protect and defend all Allies. Freedom will always win out over oppression”.

The next day, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Tod Wolters, activated the Alliance’s Gradual Response Plans. “This is a prudent and defensive step to protect and shield allied nations during this crisis”, Stoltenberg told a press conference, while confirming that this allows for the deployment of the Response Force, “if necessary”. These plans, he said, cover NATO’s eastern flank and give military commanders “more authority” to move and deploy forces in response to the situation in Eastern Europe.

The NATO Response Force (NRF), always available at the Alliance’s disposal, consists of up to 40,000 troops with the capacity to deploy to any scenario within five days and for up to 30 days. Just over a month ago, the United States announced that it was putting 8,500 troops on standby to support a possible activation of this NATO rapid reaction force in the event of Russian aggression. Its structure includes the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), created in 2014, following Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, to enhance the NRF with a forward unit of thousands of troops who, supported by air, naval and special operations forces, can be deployed on an emergency basis to deal with military crises. The leadership of the VJTF rotates annually among the Allies. France is at the helm of the High Readiness Forces for 2022 and 3,500 troops from a Franco-German



Sergey Dolzhenko/EFE

A Ukrainian soldier patrols a street in Kyiv amid damage caused by Russian missile shelling of the capital on 25 February.

to show its support for Ukraine and, at an extraordinary meeting on 1 March, unanimously adopted a resolution, recording its unwavering support for Ukraine and the efforts to bring the country closer to the Union. Ukraine’s President, Volodymyr Zelensky, gave a speech to the European Parliament in which he once again called on Europe “not to abandon us” and reiterated his firm commitment to democracy and the rule of law. After several minutes of applause, all MEPs, without exception, rose to their feet and called on the EU institutions to work towards granting the country candidate status for EU membership. Any such procedure must be in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and based on merit.

to immediately cease its military assault, to withdraw all its forces from Ukraine and to turn back from the path of aggression it has chosen. This long-planned attack on Ukraine, an independent, peaceful and democratic country, is brutal and wholly unprovoked and unjustified. We deplore the tragic loss of life, enormous human suffering and destruction caused by Russia’s actions. Peace on the European continent has been fundamentally shattered. The world will hold Russia, as well as Belarus, accountable for their actions”. At the same time, and after explaining that, following the request of some Allies (in particular the three Baltic countries and Slovakia), there had been consultations under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, which is

brigade will function as the main core of the force this year. As Stoltenberg stressed, they would be activated as a deterrent to prevent an escalation of the crisis as a sign of commitment to the defence of all members of the organisation. In any case, the Secretary General has limited the actions to NATO territory, recalling that the military organisation has no troops in Ukraine and “no plans to deploy them”. In a complex balance of toughness, wisdom and responsibility, Stoltenberg also indicated that despite everything —Russia even threatened to use nuclear weapons and openly told Sweden and Finland to “abide by the consequences” if they decided to apply for NATO membership— they were keeping the door open to dialogue and called again for Moscow to withdraw its troops from Ukraine.

At the same time, the Alliance’s long-standing military reinforcement of its eastern flank as part of its shared security and deterrence missions has increased. Specifically, in addition to the current deployment —Stoltenberg pointed out: “We have over 100 jets on high alert. And there are more than 120 Allied ships at sea, from the High North to the Mediterranean”— the NATO Military Committee, which met urgently on Monday 28 February by videoconference, agreed to accelerate plans to reinforce NATO’s deployment in allied countries bordering Russia. The four multinational enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battlegroups, created in 2016 in Poland, and the three Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), in response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, will be joined by four additional battlegroups in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. In addition, existing contingents are being enlarged (battalions are becoming reinforced brigades) and will be able to withstand an initial surprise attack by Russian troops until reinforcements arrive. Within this same concept of allied solidarity, NATO also maintains enhanced Air Policing (eAP) missions in the three Baltic States and in the Black Sea (Romania and Bulgaria).

#### DIALOGUE AND DETERRENCE

The invasion of Ukraine was, unfortunately, a war foretold. And attempts to prevent it did not cease right until the moment it happened. Just a week before the attack, Ukraine was high on the agenda of the



During the extraordinary European Council of heads of state and government on 24 February, leaders connected with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to show their support.

meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence which took place in Brussels on 16-17 February. Joint responsiveness and shared security were already the keys to an Alliance that has reasserted itself in the face of a threat to Europe’s security, unprecedented since the end of the Cold War. The ministers’ statement sought to confirm, once again, that the Alliance will always keep the door open and encourage negotiation.

In the same vein and without leaving any room for doubt, the statement signed by the ministers stresses that: “Russia’s actions pose a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security [...] Our measures are and remain preventive, proportionate and non-escalatory”. Moreover, the official text adopted after the Atlantic Defence Council indicated that: “NATO and Allies continue to pursue diplomacy and dialogue with Russia

## NATO has reinforced its Eastern Flank and activated its Response Force

on Euro-Atlantic security issues, including at the highest levels [...] We have expressed our readiness to engage in a Renewed European Security Dialogue in the OSCE”.

At the post-Council press conference, Stoltenberg again recalled that NATO is a defensive alliance and not a threat to anyone: “And we have been clear for years and months that we are ready to sit down, and also listen to Russian security concerns, and to address issues like, for instance, arms control. If they are concerned about missiles and offensive weapons, the best way to deal with that is to sit down and engage in good faith in talks about how can we limit, reduce number of missiles. But that has to be balanced and verifiable. We have been able to do that before. It is possible to make agreements with Russia, not least on arms control”.

On the second day, the ministers met with their counterparts from Ukraine and Georgia and reiterated the Alliance’s strong political and practical support to these two countries to enhance their defence capabilities, especially with regard to cybersecurity and intelligence. According to the Secretary General: “Allies confirmed that NATO’s door remains open; any decision on NATO membership is for NATO Allies and aspirant countries to take; nobody else”.

Rosa Ruiz