

Two years of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

## Support for Ukraine: Europe must step up its efforts

Julian Bergmann

German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)



Bonn, 26 February 2024. February 24 marked the second anniversary of the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. In fact, this date already marks the tenth anniversary of the Russian war against Ukraine, which began with the military occupation of Crimea in 2014. There is currently no foreseeable end to the war, which has already brought so much suffering and destruction. Due to the difficult military situation, Ukraine is facing an uncertain future. It is precisely now that Europe must not let up in its support for the country, and should intensify its efforts – including the reconstruction of Ukraine, which has already begun, as well as the country's further integration into the European Union (EU).

“Europe will be at Ukraine's side for every single day of the war, and for every single day thereafter.” This is what Commission President Ursula von der Leyen recently said in the European Parliament. Indeed, the European Union has made enormous efforts over the past year to support Ukraine politically, militarily, and

financially. The historic decision of the European Council of 14 December 2023 to open EU accession negotiations with Ukraine was an important milestone for the country and for the EU itself.

In addition to arms deliveries worth around 28 billion euros, civilian support from the EU and its Member States has already amounted to more than 60 billion euros since February 2022. This includes budget aid to the Ukrainian state, humanitarian aid, and services for Ukrainian refugees in the EU, but also funds for reconstruction measures such as the repair of schools, hospitals, homes or electricity grids. Development cooperation plays an important geopolitical role here as a central instrument for reconstruction, since it contributes to stabilising the country in the face of Russian aggression.

At the same time, it is already clear that the level of aid provided so far will not be sufficient to support Ukraine comprehensively enough in its continued fight against Russian aggression and in the reconstruction of the country. According to current estimates by the World Bank, the latter will cost at least \$486 billion.

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The EU's decision to set up a "Ukraine Facility", through which 50 billion euros in financial aid will be provided to Ukraine in the period 2024-2027, is enormously important to ensure the financial stability of the Ukrainian state. And given the initial obstructive attitude of the Hungarian government, it is also a great success for joint European action.

However, the funds of the Ukraine Facility, which consist of two-thirds of loans, will be primarily needed to close the annual financing gap in the Ukrainian state budget, so that salaries and pensions can continue to be paid and state services can be maintained. According to estimates, the government deficit, which must be closed with the support of international donors, is at least \$37 billion this year. The financing of comprehensive reconstruction measures with the Ukraine Facility will therefore only be possible to a limited extent

in the next few years, although the instrument is also intended for this purpose.

Also, the pressure on Europe – and especially Germany – could increase further if Donald Trump is actually re-elected as US president in November. For weeks, Republicans in Congress have been blocking military and financial aid, which Ukraine urgently needs. If the US ceases to be Ukraine's most important ally, the EU will have to assume even greater responsibility for supporting the country. As of today, it does not seem to be well prepared for this. An example of this is the missed goal of the EU to produce one million rounds of artillery ammunition for Ukraine within one year.

In the medium term, military, financial and political support to Ukraine will only be successful if all EU Member States are willing to provide more and long-term money for support to Ukraine – both bilaterally and through the EU budget. In particular, countries such as France, Italy or Spain, which have so far been rather reluctant to provide military and financial aid, are also called for here. They may put a stronger focus on other world regions such as North and Sub-Saharan Africa – but the consequences of a Russian victory in Ukraine would be felt everywhere in Europe.

The adoption of the "Ukraine Plan", which sets out the objectives for the implementation of the Ukraine Facility for the period 2024-2027, could be a good starting point for greater European coordination of bilateral financial assistance. In addition, the Federal Government should use the upcoming Ukraine Recovery Conference in Berlin in June 2024 to mobilise the European and international donor community even more strongly to support Ukraine.

After all, the shadow of war hangs over both the reconstruction of the country and the upcoming EU accession negotiations. Therefore, a continuation of military support is indispensable to give the Ukrainians the opportunity to realise their vision of a free and sovereign Ukraine within the EU.

In the course of the upcoming election campaign for the European elections, populist parties will certainly question aid to Ukraine. European politicians should proactively engage in this debate and make the case for supporting Ukraine. Because the latter is not only a question of European solidarity – it is in all of our interests to ensure a stable European security order.