Ukraine is Europe

by Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament

The world we knew radically changed on 24 February 2022. On that day and for every day since, the lives of millions of Ukrainian families were shattered. From one moment to the next, many had to abandon everything. Eight million Ukrainians, were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in the European Union. Another 6 million became internally displaced.

The world also changed for all of us who are witnessing the brutality, the injustice, the blatant violation of international law, the terror, disrespect for human rights, the war crimes that, a year later, are still being committed on sovereign Ukrainian territory.

We all want peace. The Ukrainians the most. The whole European idea is built on peace. But, peace without freedom and peace without justice is no peace at all.

Speaking in the European Parliament just two weeks ago President Zelenskyy outlined how he sees Europe as a continent steeped in rules, values, equality and fairness, and a place where Ukraine is firmly at home. The Kremlin, on the other hand, he said, is doing its utmost to destroy European values.

This is why we will continue to stand with Ukraine. Their citizens depend on it. Europe depends on it. Peace depends on it. We stand alongside the countless families that have found themselves stripped of everything. We stand with the Ukrainian defence forces that fight for freedom, democracy and the rules-based world order. We stand with those who fight for us.

This is why the European Parliament is calling for a Special Tribunal to be set up that can bring all those responsible for war crimes to justice - crimes that have no statute of limitations. Crimes that we cannot turn a blind eye to.

This is why the European Union must push on with sanctions on Russia, individuals and entities that support Putin's illegal war, and why we must put pressure on other countries and private companies that still deal with the Kremlin. There can be no business as usual with Russia.

Looking ahead, the European Parliament wants to start planning for liberation day. For EU membership for Ukraine. An aim, to which each candidate country has its own path, but one to which we should open the negotiations as soon as possible. The perspective of membership will help, not only morally and symbolically, but also when it comes to the rebuilding of a free Ukraine.

This will not only relate to the enormous physical reconstruction of Ukraine, but also its administrative, governance and justice systems. It will require hard work and difficult reforms. It will require change and bold decisions.

The European Parliament and a multitude of EU programmes can help. But if the last year has proved anything, it is that the Ukrainian people are among the bravest, most resilient and impressive examples of a people fighting and beating the odds. They deserve our unwavering support. We belong together. Ukraine is Europe. Europe is Ukraine.