

**Remarks of Ukrainian World Congress President Eugene Czolij before the
Delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee of the European Parliament
on 8 December 2015 in Brussels, Belgium**

Honourable Mr. Chairman:

Distinguished Members of the Delegation:

I first wish to thank the Delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee of the European Parliament and its Chair, Mr. Andrej Plenković, for the invitation to address your Delegation today on the following topic: *“Exchange of views on EU strategic communication and the hybrid war in Ukraine”*.

The international community is being challenged by the hybrid warfare being conducted by President Vladimir Putin to promote his imperialistic ambitions.

In addition to his military offensives, the Russian President has launched a disinformation campaign to distract from the very real threat being posed by Russian aggression to the independence and territorial integrity of sovereign countries, the European community, Western values and global security.

In 2014 alone, Russia dedicated 643 million Euros from its state budget to support the promotion by Russian media of President Putin's *“Russkiy Mir”* or *“Russian World”*.

Therefore, the international community must stay focused on what is at stake, develop solutions that unequivocally articulate the threat we face, and communicate why this issue is important to every individual for whom freedom and democracy are paramount.

EU strategic communication must be further developed with the following objectives:

- a) fully expose the Russian agenda;
- b) explain the reasons for the disinformation campaign; and
- c) broaden the strategy to include the West.

It is important to raise awareness that, a decade ago, President Vladimir Putin declared that *“the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century”*. He then predicted that by 2015 the Soviet Union would be recreated under a new name, the *Eurasian Economic Union*, composed of former Soviet republics, including Ukraine. A crucial step in that direction was to ensure that the *EU-Ukraine Association Agreement* would be frustrated and that Ukraine would be integrated as a member of the Russia-dominated *Customs Union*.

For President Putin, Ukraine's subjugation is essential because he understood the view expressed by Zbigniew Brzezinski some twenty years ago that: *“Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire.”*

As soon as President Putin realized that his imperialist world vision was shattered by Ukraine's EuroMaidan, he sent his *“little green men”* into Crimea in February 2014. The failure of the international community to immediately respond in a meaningful way to this invasion emboldened Russia to conquer more territory, this time in Eastern Ukraine starting in April 2014.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs provided the following figures to summarize the dramatic consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine as at 31 October 2015: almost 8,000 people killed, over 17,000 people wounded, 1.5 million internally displaced persons, including 194,000

children, 5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, and 30,000 hectares contaminated by landmines. Moreover, a joint mission of the UN, the EU and the World Bank estimated that the cost of recovery for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Eastern Ukraine as a result of Russian aggression was US \$1.5 billion.

These statistics are dreadful but they are not surprising since the aim of President Putin is to destabilize Ukraine, render it a failed state, and then re-conquer it.

In light of all of the above, in July 2015, during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, General Joseph Dunford, the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that Moscow's conduct in Ukraine and in Eastern Europe was "*nothing short of alarming*," adding that "*Russia presents the greatest threat to our national security*" and "*could pose an existential threat to the United States*."

President Putin's aggression in Ukraine is not an isolated event. It is part of a broader pattern that threatens international stability in Europe and beyond. The Russian President's end game is not Luhansk nor Donetsk, nor is it just Ukraine. The end game for the Russian President is the whole of the former Soviet Union and more. This must be understood in order to develop effective strategies to counter Russia's imperialistic ambitions.

Russia's first overt violation of the territorial integrity of a sovereign country after the Second World War occurred when it sent its army to seize Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia in August 2008.

Another violation with a significant international impact occurred in Ukraine's Donetsk region in July 2014 with the downing of flight MH-17 by Russia-backed terrorists, killing all 298 passengers and crew members from 10 different countries.

A month later, in August 2014, President Putin declared that there had never been a country called Kazakhstan. Those words take on an even more menacing meaning when one recalls that in April 2008, during the Bucharest NATO Summit, Prime Minister Putin told U.S. President George Bush: "*You have to understand, George. Ukraine is not even a country.*"

Moreover, in the first 6 months of 2015, NATO intercepted 250 Russian planes violating European, Canadian and U.S. airspace, which constitutes the greatest number of such violations since the end of the Cold War.

These violations are not coincidental as they are consistent with President Putin's mission based on his repeated assertions that he has both a right and a duty to "*protect ethnic Russians and Russian speakers*", wherever they may be. This dangerous statement threatens not only Ukraine, but also Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, among others.

Clearly, the Kremlin wishes to regain Russia's past sphere of influence over the post-Soviet space. This Russian agenda is being furthered by employing the tool of disinformation.

Thus, we have an obligation to expose the "false information" so that the truth can be more clearly visible. However, simply exposing the "false information" can prove to be insufficient if there is no broader understanding of the underlying reasons for its dissemination.

The Ukrainian World Congress considers that the Action Plan on Strategic Communication developed by the European External Action Service is a positive step toward demonstrating that the international

community has recognized the revisionist geopolitical objectives of President Putin and acknowledged the magnitude and influence of Russia's disinformation tactics.

However, this Action Plan requires stronger measures specifically designed to counter the Russian narrative and, more importantly, address the effect of the manipulation of information on our core democratic values and global security.

The Ukrainian World Congress also welcomes the creation of the East StratCom Task Force as a step in the right direction. This initiative, however, should be strengthened by broadening the scope of activity beyond the core task force based in Brussels. The team needs to be expanded and its focus should also include the West. Partnerships with NGOs and media outlets throughout the EU Member States and Eastern Partnership Countries will serve to amplify the EU message.

Since the end of the Cold War, European and U.S. policy toward Russia has been grounded in a fundamental respect for independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of states. With his hybrid warfare, President Putin has changed these rules of global order and created an international crisis.

I therefore call upon this Delegation to show principled leadership by advocating that the international community should be resolute and unwavering in its determination to eradicate all forms of terrorism, particularly state-sponsored terrorism, including the terrorists in Eastern Ukraine, who are fully backed, trained, equipped and financed by Russia.

If the international community adopts a policy of appeasement toward President Putin in a misguided attempt to strengthen its fight against ISIS, we could face the same tragic consequences of similar policies of appeasement followed by Europe that led to the Second World War.

Indeed, if the international community does not help Ukraine protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity by forcing President Putin to remove his military forces from Eastern Ukraine and return Crimea to Ukraine, Russia will be further emboldened to continue threatening peace and security in other regions of Europe and elsewhere.

For example, in light of the recent Russo-Turkish confrontation, it is quite conceivable that President Putin could challenge Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, leading to several possible consequences, such as the triggering of a Third World War or the disintegration of NATO if it should fail to come to the assistance of a NATO member country – one of President Putin's primary objectives.

I therefore call upon this Delegation to promote that the international community remain united in supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity, including the imposition of further and decisive economic sanctions against Russia that would make it prohibitive for Russia to pursue its imperialistic plans, and compel it to withdraw its military forces from Ukraine and fully respect Ukraine's independence.

Finally, in view of the devastation that Russia's aggression has inflicted on Ukraine, I encourage this Delegation to recommend that the international community initiate the equivalent of a Marshall Plan for Ukraine to help it to overcome its current economic crisis and implement the necessary reforms that would enable it to become a successful and fully-integrated European country.